

**‘I FEEL SO TIRED I COULD SLEEP FOR DAYS’:  
DISCOURSE, GENDER AND WORKING PARENTS IN THE  
UK**

**GEMMA ANNE YARWOOD**

**A Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements  
of the  
Manchester Metropolitan University for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**Research Institute for Health and Social Change  
Manchester Metropolitan University  
2014**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Life does not stop when studying for a PhD. I thank Carol Tindall, my supervisor, for teaching me this. Carol passed away during my time studying for this PhD and I celebrate her commitment to gender equality in this thesis.

This doctoral study has been marked by periods of joy and some sadness including life events of birth and death. I wish to extend my gratitude to my family and friends for their support during these times when completing my thesis seemed a distant dream. Mum, in answer to your often repeated question, 'Have you handed in that damn PhD yet?' I can now resolutely answer, 'Yes'. Thank you Mum and Dad for your unconditional love.

My supervisor, Rebecca Lawthom, has been an inspiration to me throughout my doctoral studies. I am indebted to her for her unwavering guidance, constancy and irrepressible optimism. Katherine Runswick-Cole was a welcome late addition to my supervisory team and I thank her for her professionalism and thoughtful, detailed consideration of my thesis.

Undertaking this study would not have been possible without the working parents who volunteered to participate in this study and I thank each one of them. Alongside this, I am grateful to my colleagues and peers from Manchester Metropolitan University's Research Institute of Health and Social Change (RIHSC) and the Psychology of Women Section (POWS) of the British Psychological Society. In these foras, I have been supported and encouraged by too many people to mention by name. Jenny Slater and Jenny Fisher, as doctoral students themselves, helpfully shared their experiences at different stages in the doctoral process. Thanks also to Lisa Bell for her unique insight.

Lastly, but by no means least, I acknowledge the patience of Andy, my partner, and Adam, my three year old son. Together, as a family, we manage our own patchwork quilt of work and family. Adam, I promise that now I have submitted my thesis, you do not have to watch Manchester City football with your dad whilst I stay home to study.

**In memory of Carol Tindall, a strong women, inspirational  
teacher and adventurer**

**For Adam**

## **Abstract**

Situated in early twenty-first century UK, I critically review the work-family reconciliation policy landscape to illuminate embedded gendered discourses and practices of caring and working. I critically examine the historical, social and cultural context of these gendered working and caring practices. Drawing on semi-structured qualitative interviews with fourteen working parents (nine mothers and five fathers), with children under 5 years old, I adopt a discourse analysis approach to consider both the performative aspects of their interview talk and the influence of wider discourses of caring and working. The thesis culminates in the development of knowledge and understanding of the intricate constitutive network of, the individual parent, the caring and working practices in which they engage, the social structure within which they live and the discourses which frame these.

Drawing on large scale studies of the participation of mothers and fathers in care and employment, this thesis responds to a need for research which connects the complex relationship of caring and working discourses and practices at the macro-level of UK society and the micro-level of individual working parents' talk. To do this I analyse data from semi-structured interviews with fourteen working parents. In these analytical chapters, I focus on the discourse practices and discourse resources the working parents mobilised to position themselves within caring and working discourses. This thesis contributes to knowledge and understanding of gender, discourse and working parents' talk using a sophisticated blended approach to discourse analysis. Additionally, having become a first-time mother during this study, I reflexively detail how this presented me with a unique position of knowledge, understanding and experience as a full-time working mother and researcher.

To summarise, I connect contemporary UK work-family reconciliation policy, feminist scholarship and empirical discourse analysis of working parents' interview talk to reveal ways in which discourses of working and caring are inextricably linked both in language performance in working parents' interview talk and wider work-family reconciliation policy discourses in early twenty-first century UK.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iv
List of outputs and dissemination .....	ix
Peer Reviewed Journal Publications.....	ix
Selected Conference Outputs .....	ix
Chapter One: Introducing the Thesis .....	1
1.1 Locating the research .....	1
1.2 Research Aims.....	4
1.3 Thesis structure .....	5
1.4 The importance of the research .....	11
Chapter Two: Reviewing the work-family reconciliation policy landscape .....	13
2.1 Introduction.....	13
2.2 Key concepts.....	14
2.2.1 Work-family and work-life.....	15
2.2.2 Work-life balance.....	16
2.2.3 Work-family reconciliation .....	18
2.3 UK Work-Family Reconciliation Policy Development .....	19
2.4 Labour force participation in early twenty-first century UK.....	23
2.5 Positioning micro-level data alongside macro-level data to inform the policy landscape .....	26
2.6 Flexible Working .....	30
2.7 Problematizing gender within policy discourse .....	33
2.8 Positioning caring and working in work-family reconciliation policy.....	37
2.9 Summary.....	40
Chapter Three - Gender, paid work and care .....	42
3.1 Introduction.....	42
3.2 Situating gender in historical, social and cultural context of the division of labour....	44
3.3 Feminist scholarship tracing women as workers and carers in the twentieth century .....	51
3.4 Men, Women and Othering .....	56
3.5 Internal debates amongst feminist scholars of gender, work and care.....	59
3.6 Father's working and caring practices in twenty-first century Britain.....	64
3.7 Gender relations, mothers and fathers.....	68
3.8 Summary.....	70

Chapter Four: Methodology .....	72
4.1 Introduction .....	72
4.2 Research Beliefs and the Location of the Study .....	72
4.3 Reflexivity .....	77
4.4 Studying Gender and Discourse .....	79
4.5 Qualitative Interviews .....	82
4.5.1 Interview Participants and Recruitment .....	82
4.5.2 Introducing the participants .....	85
4.5.3 Interview Schedule .....	90
4.6 Ethical Considerations .....	93
4.7 The Study's Discursive Framework .....	97
4.8 Procedure for analysing the interview talk .....	102
4.8.1 Interviewing, transcription and reading .....	104
4.8.2 Discourse constructions .....	105
4.8.3 Discourses and discourse resources .....	105
4.8.4 Action Orientation .....	106
4.8.5 Discourse practices .....	106
4.8.6 Writing up the analysis .....	109
4.9 Summary .....	111
Chapter Five: Discourses of Caring .....	113
5.1 Introduction .....	113
5.2 Constructing women as innate carers .....	114
5.3 Caring practices .....	117
5.4 Debbie constructs intensive caring as servitude .....	119
5.5 Working parents talking about the impact of intensive caring .....	124
5.6 Summary .....	130
Chapter Six: Discourses of working .....	133
6.1 Introduction .....	133
6.2 Constructing paid work outside the home as ordinary .....	133
6.3 Positioning their own parents in constructions of paid work .....	135
6.4 Rick, his own father and constructions of the provider father .....	138
6.5 Stan constructs the provider father as ordinary .....	140
6.6 Brad constructs a 'trade-off' as a working father .....	143
6.7 Constructions of paid work as minimising time spent on caring activities .....	145

6.8 Flexible working .....	147
6.9 Part-time working.....	151
6.10 Summary.....	155
Chapter Seven: Cancelled childcare and delays at work.....	158
7.1 Introduction.....	158
7.2 Unexpected illness and cancelled childcare.....	159
7.3 Being delayed at work.....	168
7.4 Professional and non-professional paid work .....	174
7.5 Framing the research participation as adding to the complexity of work-family reconciliation .....	179
7.6 Summary.....	180
Chapter Eight: Concluding Discussions.....	183
8.1 Introduction.....	183
8.2 Thesis summary.....	184
8.3 Implications for research .....	188
8.3.1 Research attending to both macro-level and micro-level analysis of working parent's caring and working practices.....	189
8.3.2 Studying discourses of caring and working.....	191
8.3.3 Gender, paid work and unpaid caring .....	193
8.4 Policy recommendations .....	195
8.4.1 Recommendation one: .....	196
8.4.2 Recommendation two: .....	197
8.5 Research Challenges.....	199
8.5.1. Mothers and fathers as participants in qualitative research .....	199
8.5.2 Reifying gender dualism.....	203
8.6 What about me? Revisiting my position in the research journey .....	207
8.7 Reflexivity.....	210
8.8 Summary.....	212
References .....	214
Appendix one: Consent Form.....	238
Appendix Two: Interview Schedule Information Sheet for Participants .....	239
Appendix Three: Participant Profiles.....	240
Appendix Four: .....	246
4.1 Sample of Transcript.....	246
4.2 The messy realities of discourse analysis. ....	247

Appendix Five – Dissemination of study.....	248
A5.1 Policy event.....	248
A5.2 Academic Journal Articles .....	249
Article One.....	249
Article Two.....	250
A5.2.3 Conference Papers .....	251
Paper One .....	251
Paper Two .....	252
Paper Three .....	253
Paper Four .....	254
Paper Five .....	255
Paper Six .....	256



## List of outputs and dissemination

### Peer Reviewed Journal Publications

Yarwood, G.A. (2011) 'The Pick and Mix of Fathering Identities' In *Fathering*, Vol. 9, No. 2, Spring 2011, pp.150-168. DOI: 10.3149/fth.0902.150.

Yarwood, G. A.(2013) 'Talking about the personal: a pregnant researcher's experience of studying working parents in the UK' In *Families, Relationships and Societies*, Vol 2 (3) pp.441–55. DOI: 10.1332/204674313X664833.

### Selected Conference Outputs

Yarwood, G.A. (2009) 'In pursuit of work-family harmonisation: Experiences of piecing the jigsaw together'. *Paper presented at: Community, Work and Family 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference, Utrecht, Netherlands, 16 April.*

Yarwood, G.A. (2010) 'Unlocking and writing up qualitative data: Searching for the elusive golden key'. Paper presented at: *Annual Research Institute of Health and Social Change Conference*. Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK. 2 July.

Yarwood, G.A. (2012) 'Getting Personal in Work-Family Research: Positionality and Reflexivity'. Paper presented at: *Inaugural Work and Family Researchers Network Conference*. New York City, USA. 14 June.

Yarwood, G.A. (2012) 'Embodying Womanhood?: Doing Pregnancy, Doing Research'. Paper presented at: *The 3rd Global Conference on Femininities and Masculinities*. Prague, Czech Republic. 22 May.

Yarwood, G.A. (2013) 'A critical examination of enduring gendered constructs of caring and working within UK work-family reconciliation policy'. Presented at *Neoliberalism as Policy, Theory and Practice Conference*, Manchester Metropolitan University Manchester, UK. 6 June.

Yarwood, G.A. (2013) 'Working mothers, vomiting children and cancelled childcare: Disrupting gendered care/work arrangements'. Paper presented at: *BPS Psychology of Women Section Annual Conference*. Cumberland Lodge, Windsor. 11 July.

## **Chapter One: Introducing the Thesis**

This doctoral study is situated in early twenty-first century UK. I connect contemporary UK work-family reconciliation policy, feminist scholarship and empirical discourse analysis of fourteen working parents' interview talk to reveal ways in which discourses of working and caring are inextricably linked both in working parent's interview talk and wider policy discourses in early twenty-first century UK.

In this first chapter, I intend to provide a clear introduction to the thesis. To do this I have divided the chapter into the following four sections: *Locating the research*, *Research aims*, *Thesis structure* and *The importance of the research*. I will now take each of these sections in turn.

### **1.1 Locating the research**

Much of my interest in how mothers and fathers practice caring and working stems from my childhood experiences of how it was managed in my own family in the 1970s and 1980s. Both my parents worked shifts and, from an early age, I experienced, first hand, how my parents managed caring and paid work. I still have vivid memories of arriving home from school to find our evening meal already prepared by my mum before she had left for work. My siblings and I would each have a plate of food ready to be warmed. My mum knew exactly which of us didn't eat fish, that my oldest sister didn't like eggs and that my brother would eat almost anything. In the 1990s, I learnt about how other families practiced work and care as a Sociology undergraduate (1992- 1995) and, later, as a part-time M.Ed student (1997-1999). Thus, in 2008, when the opportunity to undertake a PhD presented itself, I chose to continue to extend my knowledge and understanding of the interplay of family, work and gender.

Importantly, I begin by situating this doctoral study in the UK in early twenty-first century where there has been a well-documented increase of women (particularly mothers) in the labour market and recorded rise in fathers' participation in caring

(Fatherhood Institute, 2010; OECD, 2010; Office National Statistics, 2008). These changes have been evidenced in large scale macro-level studies such as the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) a national longitudinal survey of children born from September 2000 onwards and their families (Hansen, Joshi and Dex, 2010). Hansen et al (2010) argue that, given the reconfiguration of work and care participation by mothers and fathers, research on gender, care and work in early twenty-first century UK is timely. Edwards and Gillies (2012) argue that large scale survey data such as MCS provides a valuable macro-level overview of the caring and working practices of British parents. They note that micro-level research, defined as small scale, is also valuable to understanding caring and practices of working parents' in early twenty-first century UK (ibid). In this thesis micro-level data is based on fine grained discourse analysis of interview talk with fourteen individual working parents' with children aged under five. According to Wetherell (2001a) discourse analysis has become increasingly important in the social sciences, facilitating the critical examination of meanings that events and experiences hold for social actors. Particularly 'It offers new methods and techniques for the social researchers interested in meaning-making' (Wetherell, 2001a: 1). With this mind, throughout this study, I position micro-level data gained from my empirical discourse analysis alongside macro-level data such as MCS (Hansen et al, 2010). I do this by critically reviewing the UK work-family reconciliation policy landscape in early twenty-first century (macro-level data) and analysing working parents' interview talk about their working and caring practices (micro-level data). Focusing on critically analysing discourses of working and caring both in work-family reconciliation policy and working parent's interview talk, I draw on Du Gay's (1996: 43) framing of discourse:

Discourse is a group of statements which provide a language for talking about a topic and a way of producing a particular kind of knowledge about a topic. Thus the term refers both to the production of knowledge through language and representations and the way that knowledge is institutionalized, shaping social practices and setting new practices into play.

I intend to discuss this in more detail below by presenting the thesis aims and thesis summary. However, firstly, I wish to make clear that, in this study I refer to working parents' caring practices to mean caring for their children. Unless I state

otherwise, I am focusing on informal caring of their children only<sup>1</sup>. In chapter two I draw on Morgan's (1996) notion of family practices to specify that I am referring to caring for children as practices parents (historically mothers) do within their family unit thus caring practices are of central concern to work-family policy landscape. Furthermore as this chapter is an introduction, I use chapters two and three of the thesis to make clear the meanings and usages of the key concepts of gender, work, care and family. Alongside this, chapter two includes a detailed critical consideration of the development of these concepts within the UK work-family policy context of early twenty-first century UK. Throughout the thesis I define work-family reconciliation as providing meaning to the linkages between the rhythms and exigencies of family life and paid employment (Daly, 2010). In chapter two, *Reviewing the work-family reconciliation policy landscape*, I note that, whilst work-life balance discourse has become the far most researched and dominant discourse within the field of work, family and life (Lewis, 2010), I chose to focus on work-family reconciliation. In short, as this doctoral study centres on working parents, I argue that work-family rather than work-life is more conceptually fitting in this thesis. Furthermore I chose to examine work-family reconciliation policy discourse because it has been embedded in the European Union Directives (detailed in chapter two) which significantly laid the foundations for the UK's work-family policy as it stands in early twenty-first century (Sigle-Rushton and Kenney (2004). Chapter two provides an extensive discussion of my rationale for choosing to focus on work-family reconciliation policy in early twenty-first century UK.

Finally, in this introduction, I must reiterate that this thesis focuses on data at the micro-level (individuals talk) and the macro–societal level (UK as a nation). In chapter two I consider the call from Gambles et al (2006) to consider the interplay of care and work at the multiple levels of nations, societies, communities, organisations, families and individuals. Linked to this, I justify my own discursive approach to examine the ways in which discourse practices in talk and wider discourses of caring and working are constitutive of each other (discussed in chapters four and eight).

---

<sup>1</sup> I am differentiating this from informal caring of others including spouse, relatives and friends.

As I mentioned earlier, this chapter presents an introduction to the thesis. I provide a more detailed discussion of the points made here throughout the thesis. I now turn to introduce the *Research aims* then move on to *Thesis structure* where I state how these aims are embedded in the chapters.

## 1.2 Research Aims

Broadly speaking, the research aims are as follows:

1. Critically understand early twenty-first century UK work-family reconciliation policy landscape;
2. Critically understand the historical, social and cultural context of gendered working and caring practices and discourses;
3. Analyse working parents' interview talk about their working and caring practices to critically consider what discourse practices<sup>2</sup> and discourse resources<sup>3 4</sup> they mobilise to position themselves within discourses of caring and working.

To make sense of the ways these three aims are embedded throughout the thesis, I now to discuss its organisation into chapters.

---

<sup>2</sup> According to Potter (2012) discourse practices are interactional practices between people.

<sup>3</sup> Discourse resources are defined as objects, subjects and versions of social reality available to people (Willig, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> When brought together, discourse practices are defined as what people do in talk, how they use discourse resources and how they orientate to discourse resources (ibid). See chapter four for a detailed discussion.

### 1.3 Thesis structure

Following this introductory chapter, in chapter two, *Reviewing the work-family reconciliation policy landscape* I focus on aim one of the thesis;

*Critically understand early twenty-first century UK work-family reconciliation policy landscape.*

To achieve aim one, in chapter two, I make clear the key concepts of work, life and family alongside the concepts of work-life, work-family, work-life balance and work-family reconciliation. I draw on a range of key literature, critically considering the usage, meanings and development of these concepts within the UK work-family policy context. I identify current and on-going debates relevant to work-family reconciliation policy. To do this, I ask, what discourses of caring and working are mobilised in work-family reconciliation policy? I draw on the concepts of gender and discourse to critically review the work-family reconciliation policy landscape, reviewing qualitative and quantitative data on mothers and fathers caring and working participation. As part of this, I consider enduring gendered constructs of carer / worker embedded in work-family reconciliation policy and the unequal cultural value ascribed to these constructs.

Having problematized the UK's work-family reconciliation policy in the early twenty-first century, I move on in chapter three, *Gender, paid work and care* to aim two:

*Critically understand the historical, social and cultural context of gendered working and caring practices and discourses.*

To achieve this aim I consider on-going debates about the social, cultural and historical development of gendered binaries in work and family. Using a historical and culturally specific lens (Scott, 1994), I consider early Anglo-American feminist work critiquing the sexual and gendered divisions of labour (Wharton, 2005)<sup>5</sup>. I review internal debates within feminism regarding biological determinism in which

---

<sup>5</sup> I recognise and acknowledge that this Anglo-American focus means a full discussion of the Scandinavian context and perspective extends beyond the thesis however I am aware of the valuable contribution to knowledge this Scandinavian scholarship has made.

women's capacity to give birth has been intertwined with constructions of women as mother and carer (Zalewski, 2000). In chapter three, I also discuss criticisms of exclusionary reductionism levelled at early twentieth century feminism. As part of this, I draw on Chodorow's (1978) and Ruddick's (1990) scholarship on maternal work to consider the extent to which they reinforced essentialist gender binaries. Chapter three, *Gender, paid work and care*, critically considers the debates within feminist theory about the extent to which gender relations, including gender difference and gender equality (Doucet, 2006; Scott, 1994), have historically and culturally shaped men and women's identity constructions as mothers and fathers, workers and carers. Also in chapter three, I consider working and caring practices as entangled in the lives of women as mothers and men as fathers, both historically and in early twenty-first century Britain.

In chapter four and subsequent data analysis chapters five, six and seven, I move on to aim three;

*Analyse working parents' interview talk about their working and caring practices to critically consider what discourse practices and discourse resources<sup>6</sup> they mobilise to position themselves within discourses of caring and working*

To achieve aim three I begin by outlining the methodologies and theoretical approaches that guide this research. In particular in chapter four, *Methodology*, I make clear my research beliefs and locate the study at the intersection of feminist scholarship and social constructionist theory (Gergen, 2013). To do this, I discuss the concepts of gender and discourse, describing the ways in which feminist scholarship and discourse studies were used to frame this doctoral study (ibid). Here I also discuss the complex relationships within the research process and my own positioning and experiences of these within my research journey. It is important to note that, although methodological issues are discussed here, they are not confined to, or dealt with exclusively, in chapter four, *Methodology*. I

---

<sup>6</sup> For purpose of helpfulness, I reiterate my earlier point in this chapter, 'discourse practices are interactional practices' (Potter, 2012: 580) and discourse resources are defined as objects, subjects and versions of social reality available to people (Willig, 2013). When brought together, discourse practices are defined as what people do in talk, how they use discourse resources and how they orientate to discourse resources (ibid). See chapter four for a detailed discussion.

believe there are many aspects of the research which are woven together throughout the study. Separation of these as discrete issues is practically useful for writing up a thesis however methodological issues are appropriately discussed elsewhere (including chapter eight, *Concluding discussions*) to allow me to capture the complex and interrelated nature of doing research.

In chapter four, *Methodology*, I argue that work-family research needs to critically examine the gendering of working and caring practices and position this examination within discussions about the discourses available to working parents in contemporary Britain. With this in mind, working parents (broadly defined) are the focus of this thesis, with particular theoretical and analytic attention given to interviews with working parents. To do this I draw on accounts from qualitative interviews with nine employed mothers and five employed fathers in the UK. (detailed in Chapter four and Appendix three). I describe how I adopt a broadly discourse focused approach (Wetherell et al, 2001a, 2001b) to frame the empirical data analysis of parents' talk about their working and caring practices.

I outline discourse research including debates amongst discourse scholars following different traditions. Giving a detailed discussion of my rationale for choosing what I go on to discuss as a blended approach to analysing discourse (Wetherell et al, 2001a, 2011b), I present the procedural approach undertaken during data analysis. This approach enabled me to capture the complexity of work-family reconciliation practices and discourses by analysing interview talk and wider discourses of caring and working. Wetherell's (ibid) blended version sits with the feminist theory informing this research by embracing the need to challenge dominant 'malestream' (Hearn, 2004: 49) research methods hierarchically located, legitimising only certain 'kinds' of data, information and sources (Haraway, 1988; Stanley and Wise, 1993). My adopted blended approach fits with my theoretical framework, recognising complexity in social phenomenon rather than totalizing universalism attributed to 'malestream' epistemologies and positivist methodologies (Burr, 2003; Hearn, 2004; Willig, 2013).



Making clear my rationale for my methodological choices is integral to chapter four, it provides the scaffold for the subsequent data analysis chapters and is key to achieving aim three. Thus I identify my choice to interview both working mothers and working fathers for this study. (From a total of fourteen participants, all self-ascribed as hetero-normative, twelve were married or co-habiting (Hicks,2006), two were single and separated from their partner. From the total fourteen, only one parent (Rick) does not live with their children.) Choosing to study both mothers and fathers facilitated my examination of existing contemporary Anglo-American and Western European research which focused on men as fathers (Dermott, 2008; Doucet, 2006; Henwood, Finn and Shirani, 2008; Miller, 2010; Philip, 2013) and women as mothers (May, 2008; Miller, 2005; Thomson, Kehily., Hadfield and Sharpe, 2011). Despite valuing scholarship which has studied mothers and fathers separately and in their own right, I have chosen to consider both as I feel mothering and fathering practices are inextricably linked within wider caring and working discourses and practices (Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux and Brinley, 2005; O'Brien, 2005). Thus, in chapter four, I capture the complexity embedded in these interrelated caring and working practices of mothers and fathers (as working parents) by including both in my sample of participants. I argue that any feminist analysis of gender in working and caring discourses and practices should recognise the constitutive relationship (not necessarily spousal) of the constructs of mother and father (Philip, 2013). The point being that, the constructs of mother and father are constitutive of each other within caring and working discourses and practices (I refer to this later in this chapter).

I turn to data analysis in chapters five, six and seven as I evidence the constructs of parent, mother and father interwoven within discourses of caring and working in the interview talk. To analyse this evidence I draw back on chapter three, *Gender, paid work and care* (and my focus on aim two) where I reiterate that, the concept of gender is both a construct of particular social, cultural and historical contexts and also part of the social relations embedded within social practices and discourses (Nicholson, 1990). In the data analysis chapters, I discursively analyse the interview talk to capture the gendered caring and working discourses in parents' talk about these practices. As Burr (2003) states, a blended version of

discourse analysis reconceptualises the false dichotomy between the individual agent and social structures by recognising their interdependence. This facilitates the achievement of aim three of this research thesis by critically analysing the discursive practices the interviewees (the individual agents) mobilise to position themselves within wider discourses of caring and working. This brings together the two key concepts of discourse practices and discourse resources (as detailed in aim three). Discourse practices are defined as what people do in talk, how they use discourse resources and how they orientate to discourse resources (Willig, 2013). Discourse resources are defined as objects, subjects and versions of social reality available to people (ibid). In chapters five, six and seven, I discuss emergent evidence from the interviews in which the participants mobilised discourse practices to position themselves in the discourses of working and caring, which have been historically, socially and culturally critiqued (by feminists and social constructionist alike) as discourses (re)producing gendered binaries.

Whilst staying focused on aim three, throughout these empirical discourse analysis chapters (five, six and seven) I present evidence of parents' talk about working and caring for their children. These data analysis chapters are divided into three distinct yet interrelated chapters; *Discourses of caring* (chapter five), *Discourses of working* (chapter six) and, in chapter seven, the interplay and tensions between these working and caring discourses, *Cancelled childcare and delays at work*. These chapter divisions emerged from the data and again, separation of these discourses into chapters is practically useful for the writing up of this thesis, however, these are interwoven discourses, as I discuss throughout the thesis including chapter eight, *Concluding discussions*.

Parker (1992) states, discourses 'facilitate and limit, enable and constrain what can be said (by whom, where, when)' (1992: xiii). The discourses of caring and working were my starting point shaped by aim one, my critical review of early twenty-first century work-family reconciliation policy. I decided that analysing the discursive practices used in talk (situated within what I clarified earlier as a micro-level analysis) would complement my understanding of discourses of caring and working. In chapters five, six and seven I analyse the ways the participants constructed caring and working practices by drawing on discourses which are

historically, culturally and socially situated. Thus, as I make clear in chapter four, *Methodology*, I am assuming that the parents interviewed are doing things with their language and the ways they speak does more than simply convey a picture of what they are describing (Willig, 2013).

I wish to suggest that whilst chapters five, six and seven cover caring discourse and working discourse in discrete chapters, they function partly to provide an organised and readable version of data as it emerged. (I discuss this in detail in chapter eight). Notwithstanding my decision to make the data manageable for the purpose of this thesis and the reader, in line with the reflexive nature of this work, I feel it is essential at this stage to disclaim that during the interviews, caring and working discourses were overlapping and interlinked (as evidenced in the data analysis chapters).

The relationship between caring and working discourse and practice is discussed in chapter eight where I consider the complexity in the relationship. This chapter eight, *Concluding discussions*, draws together the three main aims of the thesis; connecting my empirical research, policy landscape and theoretical scholarship to consider working parent's talk about working and caring in early twenty-first century UK. I draw together the major themes from across the thesis, highlighting the theoretical, methodological and practical implications of the research. In chapter eight I revisit my thesis aims, arguing that the study enhances and expands empirical and theoretical understanding of caring and working discourses and practices developed and evolving in time and place. I discuss how I believe this thesis makes an important contribution to developing existing knowledge and understanding of the relationship between gender and discourses of caring and working within the context of work and family reconciliation in early twenty-first century UK.

## **1.4 The importance of the research**

Existing literature on the relationship between gender, work and family is historically wide ranging and multidisciplinary however permeating these scholarly diffuse boundaries is feminist scholarship. Feminist scholars aim to transgress traditional disciplinary malestream boundaries to engage with gender and other categories of oppression and exclusion in previously gender-blind fields of study (Haraway, 1988; Ackerly and True, 2010). In chapter three, I critically examine the historical, social and cultural context of gendered working and caring practices and discourses. This is framed by feminist scholarship which challenges assumptions based on notions of gender, work and family. This feminist scholarship stretches across decades including the early writing of Mary Wollstonecraft (1792 cited in Berges, 2013) who challenged the notion of women's 'inherent sentimentality' predisposing them to mothering and positioning them as inherently inferior to men. More recently, feminist historian Scott (1994) argues that, the feminist challenge to the gendered division of labour has been lengthy and complex. I discuss this complexity in chapter three stating that feminisms have increasingly acknowledged the importance of recognising diversity amongst women although this continues to be a challenge for all feminist scholarship whether the focus of research is on women and work, women and care or the interplay of gender, work and family (Ackerly and True, 2010). Early feminist work cannot be underestimated however, the concept of diversity amongst women was often interpreted narrowly (Hill-Collins, 1986). With this in mind, I reiterate that, in this thesis, my conceptualisation of gender acknowledges intersections with other types of social relations including class, sexuality, age, race, ethnicity and dis/ability. (I discuss this in the chapters three and four.) Notwithstanding the wider discussions about how and why scholars should recognise these intersections, gender has been foregrounded in work-family research because it is central to the issues researchers are focusing on (Hochschild, 1989) (I provide a detailed discussion of this in chapters two and three).

Throughout the thesis, I draw together feminist scholarship on gender, work and family. To do this I mobilise the term feminist-informed research to encapsulate the diverse theoretical, methodological and empirical insights into gender, work

and family produced under the rubric of feminist research (Ackerly and True, 2010). In chapter three I consider the concept of gender as a social construct and social relations, embedded within a substantive body of feminist scholarship I review in chapter three. As such I recognise the constitutive relationship between men and women as mothers and fathers, workers and carers (Hochschild, 1989, Doucet, 2006) and, in chapter eight, I call for future research which captures a rich corpus of data from both mothers and fathers (in this study the data is interview talk).

Locating this study within existing feminist informed research enables me to contribute to existing research on the relationship between gender, working and caring. This is a particularly interesting topic for feminist scholars who have made great strides in developing epistemologies concerned with gender, work and family (Doucet, 2006; Lister, 1997; Skeggs, 1997). Having critically understood the early twenty-first century UK work-family reconciliation policy landscape in chapter two (*aim one*) and critically understood the historical, social and cultural context of gendered working and caring practices and discourses in chapter three (*aim two*), I note that, despite the existence of some discussion of gender within work-family research, I believe this thesis contributes to knowledge and understanding by focusing on gender and discourse using a sophisticated blended approach to discourse analysis (Wetherell, Taylor and Yates, 2001a; 2001b). I provide more detail of this in chapter four, *Methodology*, to situate it within the study's methodological framework. Letherby (2003: 67) advocates:

...any piece of research refers to what has gone on before by adding in levels of complexity or challenging previous perspectives. What research should provide is modification, reworkings, extensions and/or critiques of existing and the creation of new concepts.

With this in mind, in chapter eight, *Concluding discussions*, I recommend further research designed to capture a rich corpus of interview talk from both mothers and fathers which can be discursively analysed. I believe this would develop existing knowledge on the complex social phenomenon of gendered discourses of work and care. I discuss this further in subsequent chapters. I now turn to chapter two, *Reviewing the work-family reconciliation policy landscape*.

## **Chapter Two: Reviewing the work-family reconciliation policy landscape**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Aim one of this thesis is to critically understand early twenty-first century UK work-family reconciliation policy landscape. I do this in chapter two by outlining UK work-family reconciliation policy in the early twenty-first century, its development and implementation. To begin, I critically consider the key conceptual linkages of work-family and work-life. This involves drawing on the exponential literature around work-life balance and work-family reconciliation (Gambles, Lewis and Rapoport, 2006). As I state in chapter one, the framework of social constructionist theory is embedded in this thesis (discussed thoroughly in chapter four), thus I argue that discourses of work-family and work-life, their meanings and usages, reflect temporal social, cultural, political and economic developments, evolving both in time and place.

In establishing the context in which UK work-family policy has developed and been implemented, I note the landscape of social, political and economic change in the UK from the 1990s to early twenty-first century (Lewis and Campbell, 2008). This is substantiated by reviewing the qualitative and quantitative data on mothers and fathers caring and working participation in the UK. I identify the policy mobilisation of the construct 'parent', in flexible working discourse, discussing the ways in which mothers and fathers are encouraged to participate in paid work as a key component of the UK's work-family reconciliation policy. The rest of the chapter is devoted to problematizing the policy on the grounds of its embedded traditional gendered constructions of caring and working practices and also the culturally, historically, socially and politically constructed value of paid work. I now turn to the key concepts.

## 2.2 Key concepts

Academics, researchers, practitioners and policy makers have contributed to a substantial body of knowledge on the linkages and interconnections of work, life and family at the level of individuals (micro-level), organisation (meso-level) and state<sup>7</sup> (macro-level)<sup>8</sup>. There has been exponential literature considering the different terms used and their meanings including, work-life balance, work-family balance and work family reconciliation. Greenhaus (2003), in his contribution to the leading international work-family researcher's network online encyclopaedia, identifies a variety of work-family and work-life linkages including compensation, segmentation, reconciliation, integration, balance, conflict and enrichment. Gambles et al (2006) have recognised that these concepts and their meanings have developed socially, historically and culturally as part of a dynamic process of construction situated in time and place. Lewis and Rajan-Rankin (2013) acknowledge that many of these concepts originated in the USA, developing in the UK.

Following discussion and guidance from my supervisors, the initial stages of this study incorporated an online google scholar search using the key concepts of work-life\* and work-family\*. After using the keyword searches work-life\*, work-family\* (the \* represents a wildcard Boolean online search), I found that, work-life balance dominated my online literature search<sup>9</sup> and was the most prevalent within the multidisciplinary literature on work-family-life linkages (ibid). In addition work-

---

<sup>7</sup> I use the term state with particular reference to the delineation of nation states within the European Union framework. The EU legislative framework has informed a significant part of the UK's adoption and development of work-family reconciliation policy.

<sup>8</sup> Lewis and Cooper (2005) suggest that, pragmatic strategies for improving work-life integration at a macro-level such as societal or nation whilst recognising other multiple levels (meso and micro levels) including workplaces, families and individuals.

<sup>9</sup> In chapter four I give a detailed discussion of methodology. As part of this, I make clear that I used a variety of strategies to develop a sufficient breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding linked to the study. Following discussion and guidance from my supervisors, the initial stages of this study incorporated an online google scholar search using the key concepts of work-life\*, work-family\*, work-family reconciliation and work-life balance. In addition I obtained additional resources, books, policy documents, research studies and academic journal articles, accessing bibliographies and following colleagues recommendations obtained through networks such as Community, Work and Family Journal, Psychology of Women Section of the BPS and Work and Family Researchers Network.

life balance and work-family reconciliation featured significantly at conferences proceedings such as Community, Work and Family Conference (2009) in Utrecht in which I attended<sup>10</sup>. As a result, I developed this study by choosing to focus on these concepts of work-life balance and work-family reconciliation. Below I consider these concepts critically, discussing their development and making their meanings clear.

### **2.2.1 Work-family and work-life**

According to Gambles et al (2006), between the 1990s and 2000s, the UK witnessed a shift from policies mobilising discourses of ‘family-friendly’ and ‘work-family’ to ‘work-life’. Initially, work-family and family-friendly policies focused on women, especially mothers (ibid). In the UK, these policies were linked to increased participation of women and mother’s in the workforce (Dex and Smith, 2002). Policies were initially a corporate-led development in the UK, motivated by national concern about the contracting pool of labour as a consequence of declining fertility rates and in response to having women employees facing issues of family formation (ibid).

Embedded in these early work-family policies were assumptions about care, particularly the gendered construction of care (Smithson and Stokoe, 2005). (I discuss this in detail in chapter three). Morgan (1996) suggests that the conceptualisations of work-family and family-friendly contained inherently homogenised and universalised constructions of paid work and the family. To question this, he mobilised the notion of practices. More specifically he focused on family practices to recognise families as dynamic and diverse in their make-up and practices. He noted that work-family policy contained gendered assumptions about who does what within the family and within the labour market (ibid). Caring for children are practices parents (historically mothers) do within their family unit thus caring practices are of central concern to work-family policy. Morgan (1996) advocated studies on how different families practice caring for their children and paid work. Whilst this chapter two focuses on meeting the thesis aim of critically

---

<sup>10</sup> In appendix five I provide the abstract of my presentation at this particular Community, Work and Family conference (2008). (Full appendix reference is A5.2.3.)



reviewing early twenty-first century UK work-family reconciliation policy, later in this thesis I foreground caring and working practices (using discourse analysis) to consider working parent's (both mothers and fathers) talk about their family practices of working and caring for their children.

### **2.2.2 Work-life balance**

As I have stated, work-family and family-friendly discourse evolved to a discourse of work-life, the precursor of work-life balance (Lewis, 2010). Greenhaus et al (2011) define work-life balance as the extent to which individuals are equally involved in and equally satisfied with their work and other life roles. The word 'balance', has often been used when linking work and life in Anglo-American literature and assumes choice and autonomy (Gambles et al, 2006). According to Lewis (2010) the origins of work-life balance discourse can be traced specifically to USA and UK, where the experience of imbalance between paid work and the rest of life were clearly evident. She notes that the UK and USA context of enhanced competitiveness through minimal regulation and reliance on market forces played a significant factor in the development of work-life balance discourse (ibid).

The discourse of work-life balance is prevalent in early twenty-first century UK, however, Smithson and Stokoe, (2005) argue that it perpetuates assumptions about individual choices based on notions of gender neutrality thus glossing over inequity between men and women in work and family. Balance, particularly in relation to work and personal life, is not always accessible, particularly to mothers, ethnic minorities and those in lower status social groups (Hochschild and Ehrenreich, 2002). Embedded in work-life balance discourse are assumptions of universality, with limited attention given to socio-cultural working and caring realities and the systems of power intersecting work and family structures (Lewis and Rajan-Rankin, 2013). (I discuss this further in chapters three and four where I focus on intersections including gender, ethnicity and class within power systems of work and family.)

Gambles et al's (2006) research into work-life balance using a global case study approach focused, not simply on families, but, potential collaborative work-life

balance changes through networks of families, communities and workplaces, framed within the wider social context. Whilst they recognised the importance of shifting away from an exclusive focus on parents when considering working and caring practices they themselves express discomfort in mobilising work-life balance terminology (ibid). In part, their acknowledged discomfort lay in what they consider are the over-simplistic binaries constructed of work alongside life within the discourse. Work-life balance assumes a fifty/fifty split, whilst in reality the interplay between work, life, and family is temporal, changing at different times and stages in a person's life. Thus the picture is a far more complex than an assumed fifty/fifty split of work-life balance.

Lewis (2010: 352) notes that the 'work-life terminology was adopted by the UK government in 2000...to frame a work-life balance campaign and policy developments' In 2010 Suzan Lewis wrote a journal paper, reflecting back on her earlier 2001 organisational case study research. She describes an optimistic view prevalent in 2001 of the discursive shift from work-family to work-life. She notes that the shift in discourse was an envisaged refocusing away from women to women and men and, from parents to entire workforces (ibid). Lewis and Campbell (2008) argued that using the discourse of work-life rather than work-family was in response to criticisms that not all individuals would become parents. They suggest that the movement towards work-life discourse was developed within a policy agenda of inclusivity (ibid). As part of this, work-life balance discourse has become the far most researched and dominant discourse within the field of work, family and life (Lewis, 2010). Whilst I recognise this dominance of work-life balance discourse, I chose to focus on work-family reconciliation in this study, in short, because this study focuses on working parents, thus work-family rather than work-life is more fitting in this thesis. Importantly, I also note that, both the concepts of work-life and work-family delineate paid work from other aspects of life including family. Later in this chapter, I critically discuss the ways in which this delineation is part of the constructed elevated value of paid work in relation to other aspects of life including caring.

### 2.2.3 Work-family reconciliation

Daly (2010) defines work-family reconciliation as providing meaning to the linkages between the rhythms and exigencies of family life and paid employment. As I have stated, aim one of this thesis is to critically review early twenty-first century UK work-family reconciliation policy landscape. Before I move on to consider the policy development, it is essential I problematize the concept of work-family reconciliation and the specific meanings delineating work and family.

Reconciliation is defined as ‘to make friendly again after estrangement’ (The Oxford Popular English Dictionary, 2010: 68) Thus, the concept of work-family reconciliation, in its literal meaning, can be interpreted as making the relationship between work and family friendly again after estrangement. In turn, this demands the question, has the relationship between work and family been previously friendly, even conciliatory? And, if so, when was this and what happened leading to a constructed need for reconciliation? In chapter three I discuss the gendered division of labour and the historical development of separate domains of care in the domestic home and paid work in the public domain. In doing so, I draw on feminist scholarship signposting UK industrialisation as significant in the construction of work and family as separate, gendered domains. These were often constructed in binary opposition (Rowbotham, 2012).

In problematizing the concepts of work-life and work-family, Gambles et al (2006) asks, why should work and life or, work and family, for that matter, be posed anti-ethically? This seems a pertinent question and one which I return to later in this thesis. Specifically, chapter eight culminates with my suggestion that, future policy and research should re-examine the relationship between caring and working<sup>11</sup>. In chapter eight I also argue that, as paid work makes up a significant part of our lives, occupies a significant part of our time thus, it seems important that its constitutive nature is recognised as part of, and not, separate to, other aspects of our daily lives including caring (O’ Brien, 2005). Having critically considered the

---

<sup>11</sup> As part of this, in chapter eight, I propose that the current Department of Work and Pensions be renamed the Department of Care, Work and Pensions.

concept of work-family reconciliation itself I now move on to consider it within a policy context.

### **2.3 UK Work-Family Reconciliation Policy Development**

When tracing the UK's work-family reconciliation policy, Dex and Smith (2002) state that, the concept of work-family reconciliation has been defined as action to enable men and women to reconcile the demands of paid work and home life. It has developed within the EU legislative framework (Hantrais, 2004). Work-family reconciliation policy is one of the main areas of UK family policies (Daly, 2010). According to the Department of Work and Pensions (2009, 2010) work-family policy is intended to make it easier for parents to manage their work-family responsibilities with both formal and informal sets of terms and conditions. Within the UK, work-family reconciliation policy is designed to enable employees to combine family responsibilities with paid employment with a wide range of practices including flexible working (such as job sharing, part-time work and flexi-time), leave entitlements (e.g. parental leave, career break) and financial assistance (including maternity and paternity pay) (ibid).

Sigle-Rushton and Kenney (2004) reviewed the development of UK work-family reconciliation policy by foregrounding its context within the European Union. They trace its development back to The Treaty of Rome, Article 119 (1957) which noted that women and men should receive equal treatment in matters of employment and pay. Significantly, it was only with subsequent European Directives several years later (namely 1992 EU directive on maternity / parental leave) that these developments culminated in what was essentially the initial steps towards the implementation of work-family reconciliation policies in EU Member States.

Unlike equal opportunities law, in which the EU took an active role from an early date, the implementation of work-support policies was, at least until the 1990, left largely to the discretion of individual states. While the need for measures to address reconciliation of work and family was repeatedly mentioned, the issue was delegated to 'soft law', (Sigle-Rushton and Kenney, 2004: 461).

'Soft law' (ibid) in this sense refers to EU recommendations rather than obligations. This led individual EU Nation States to choose whether to develop the policy recommendations on work-family support. These choices were often based on what each individual EU State deemed relevant. Sigle-Rushton and Kenney (2004) argue that this led to substantial variation of across EU states. According to Lewis and Campbell (2008), before 1997, the UK lagged behind most other EU States in its policy and provision of work-family reconciliation policy and support. Namely, despite the 1992 EU Directive on Parental Leave, in UK statute only in 1996 did this become visible thus symbolising UK policy makers reluctance to embrace work-family reconciliation as a significant policy area (ibid).

Sigle-Rushton and Kenney (2004) capture the tension between national and international policy intentions. Namely EU work-family reconciliation policy framework sought to implement 'work-family support policies' whilst there was a prevalence of work-life discourse in the UK, linked to market demands of rising competitiveness, lean workforces and greater worker productivity within Anglo-American contexts.

Speaking at a recent knowledge exchange event of policy stakeholders<sup>12</sup>, Peter John (2013) characterised the UK policy making process as multidimensional and complex, referring to social, economic and political shifts occurring between the 1990's and present. Academics, researchers and policy makers, argues John (2013), should recognise that both national and international contexts of change influenced the development of UK policy as it stands in the early twenty-first century. By recognising the development of changes, researchers, academics and policy makers can learn from the past when considering the future direction of UK policy (ibid). (I discuss how I believe this thesis can provide research data which informs future work-family policy in chapter eight).

As stated earlier, in the UK, the 1990s to 2000s witnessed a shift from family-friendly and work-family to work-life (Gambles et al, 2006). As such, in this thesis I consider this aforementioned period of the 1990s, as a significant turning point in UK work-family / work-life policy development. I trace the policy development up

---

<sup>12</sup> For details of the event which I discuss in chapter 8 see appendix five (reference A5.1. Policy event).

to 2011 because this is when I completed my study's data collection and analysis. I do, however, recognise that the policy landscape of work-family and work-life continues to evolve and as I return to in chapter eight (*Concluding Discussions*), amidst working parent's attempts to make sense of work-family reconciliation in their own lives (as detailed in chapters five, six and seven) the policy context is evolving in time and place (as I discuss below).

The election of New Labour in 1997 became a key historical period in which work-family and work-life policies started to become established in the UK (Lewis and Campbell, 2008; Lewis and Giullari, 2005 and Featherstone, 2010). Despite earlier UK Equal Opportunities Commission recommendations for a National Childcare Strategy in 1990, the Conservative Party decided not to adopt this during their time in office (Lewis and Campbell, 2008). It was after the Labour Party was elected in 1997 that the strategy was introduced<sup>13</sup>.

In terms of parental leave, evidence from the European Industrial Relations Observatory online (1998) notes its long-standing presence on the European Union's social policy agenda. The Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers (1989)<sup>14</sup> stated that 'measures should ... be developed enabling men and women to reconcile their occupational and family obligations.' (ibid) However, despite a broad consensus among Member States in favour of an EU parental leave directive<sup>15</sup> the UK's Conservative Government opposed it at the time thus preventing the Directive's adoption. Significantly the European Industrial Relations Observatory online (1998) goes on to report

The present [Labour] Government has agreed to end the UK's opt out from the Maastricht social policy agreement, and to implement the parental leave Directive. In its election manifesto, the ruling Labour Party argued that: "There must be a sound balance between support for family life and the protection of business from undue burdens - a

---

<sup>13</sup> National Childcare Strategy was initially considered in the DfEE (1998) *Meeting the childcare challenge*.

<sup>14</sup> The Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers was adopted on 9 December 1989 by a declaration of all Member States, with the exception of the UK. The Charter established key principles on which the European labour law model is based. The Charter was instrumental in producing a number of directives during the 1990s regarding pregnancy and maternity, the 1993 Working Time Directives. These were based on the framework agreements on parental leave, part-time work and fixed-term work.

<sup>15</sup> This was first put forward by the European Commission in 1983 (Sigle-Rushton and Kenney, 2004).

balance which some of the most successful businesses already strike ... While recognising the need for flexibility in implementation and certain exemptions, we support the right of employees ... to limited unpaid parental leave." The Government is expected to implement the Directive by means of regulations (secondary legislation) and is likely to undertake a consultation exercise during 1998 to seek the views of interested parties about proposals for implementing the Directive. (1998: online)

In this sense, The Labour Party's election in 1997 and its subsequent years in political office has been considered influential in unblocking previous opposition to parental leave by the Conservative Party and engaging in positive steps towards some form of work-family reconciliation policy (Lewis and Campbell, 2008; Lewis and Giullari, 2005 and Featherstone, 2010). As stated in the quotation above, the UK were slow to follow other EU member states in their adoption of work-reconciliation policy measures however concepts of flexibility and balance were prevalent in UK political speeches and policy documents (Sigle-Rushton and Kenney, 2004).

Alongside a work-family reconciliation policy discourse operating within the EU, research on work-life balance accelerated in the UK in the mid 1990's. According to Gambles et al (2006) this was amidst concerns about organisational reorganisation and efficiency targets, rapid and extensive changes in work practices, deregulation, rapid technological advancements, the infiltration of the 24/7 workplace and weakened trade unions. They characterised the period from the mid 1990's as an era of profound changes in the nature of work and ongoing negotiations of gender roles and identities (ibid). McIvor (2013) notes that employers demanded increased productivity on both men and women as workers (with more women, at this time participating in the labour market). As such, both the concepts of work-family reconciliation and work-life balance are significant to my review of the UK's work-family reconciliation policy development.

As I have stated previously, I have chosen to focus on work-family reconciliation, fitting with the study's focus on working parents whilst critically considering the problems associated with its meaning. I now turn my attention to labour force participation in early twenty-first century UK with specific consideration given to working parents. I finish the chapter by reflecting back on the key concepts and policy development to problematize work-family reconciliation policy on the

grounds of gendered assumptions and the constructed values of paid work and care.

## **2.4 Labour force participation in early twenty-first century UK**

Aim one of this thesis is to critically understand the UK's work-family reconciliation policy landscape. To meet this aim I consider the extent to which mothers and fathers are participating in the UK's labour market in the early twenty-first. Several related UK demographic and labour market changes are relevant to this participation. Drawing on numerous national and international statistics on labour force participation (OECD, 2010, ONS, 2011) these changes include the reconfiguration of paid work and the increased participation of women, especially mothers, in the labour force in the past four decades. Within the parameters of a normative definition of work as paid employment, there is a wealth of evidence on the changes in the hours people work and the type of industries they work in (Edwards and Wajcman, 2005). According to Gambles et al (2006: 4) 'paid work has become increasingly demanding and invasive in people's lives'. The contemporary landscape of paid work is complex, with much research functioning to describe the gendered nature of its complex constitution (OECD, 2010; Gunter, 2013).

Women make up nearly half of the workforce in the UK and 80% will become mothers during their working life. With the average age of motherhood in the UK being 30, most women at work over this age will also be working parents. (Working Families, 2010: 3)

Consequently, much of this paid work is part-time paid work outside the home. Women continue to provide the majority of informal care in the home (Hansen et al., 2010). Evidently, as women continue to provide the majority of informal care, the research has notably focused on women's work-family reconciliation rather than men's (Craig and Sawrikar, 2009).

Data taken at the beginning of the century revealed that more than 63 per cent of British families had two wage earners (most commonly one full-time and one part-time wage) and around 70 per cent of women returned to work after having a baby (National Family and Parenting Institute, 2003). Indeed the largest change in



labour market participation came from mothers with a child under five, increasing from 43 per cent in 1991 to 54 per cent in 2001 (ONS, 2002). The International Labour Organisation (2002) predicted that, by 2011, 80 per cent of all women in Western countries, (including the UK) will combine parenting and employment (ILO, 2002 cited in The National Family and Parenting Institute, 2003). According to the Office of National Statistics (2011) the employment rate gap between women who were mothers and not mothers decreased from 5.8 per cent in 1996 to 0.8 per cent in 2010. By the end of 2010, 67.3 per cent of women without children were in paid work, compared to 66.5 per cent of mothers in work (ibid). Whilst part-time work for mothers has remained stable over 15 years up to 2010 at 37.4 per cent, the number of mothers in full time work has risen from 23.1 per cent in 1996 to 29 per cent in 2010 (ibid).

UK employment statistics show that, employment rates for mothers peaked in the age group 35 years to 49 years (OECD, 2010). This was due to more women leaving it later in their life to have their first child (ONS, 2011). Significantly, these transformations can also be linked to reformulations in the family with, increased marital breakdown and a growing prevalence of lone parent families. Evidence supporting this highlighted an increase in the proportion of lone parents within the labour market (ibid). In 2010, 81.1 per cent of partnered mothers worked and 77.7 per cent single mothers worked (ONS, 2011). For most mothers, whether partnered or not, being in paid employment alongside caring for children is a matter of necessity, not just a means of securing a higher or more secure standard of living.

Statistics show that as the age of their first child grows so do mothers' rates of employment (OECD, 2010). Thus, whilst many scholars have acknowledged changes to working and caring practices, there are on-going debates as to the extent and shape of these changes (Featherstone, 2009). There is general agreement that, whilst mothers' participation in the workforce has increased in the past three decades, this is mainly part time work with women still carrying the main burden of caring for their family (Thomson et al., 2011).

O'Brien's (2005) review of UK work-family policy notes that, there is a growing body of evidence recognising fathers' increased involvement in the care of

children. Furthermore there is a rise in the awareness that men have childcare and home-related responsibilities, beyond breadwinning. She goes on to problematize the inclusion of fathers into an existing policy framework established to focus almost exclusively on mothers. O'Brien (2005) advocates changes to policy including introducing notions of shared caring to reduce the disparities of existing policy which include twelve month maternity leave compared to a maximum two weeks paternity leave rights and pay. According to Biggart and O'Brien (2010) the majority of modern fathers hold less traditional views than mothers on the gendered binaries of carer and worker. However, whilst expressing egalitarian views, in practice, Biggart and O'Brien (ibid) found that most fathers still work full-time and the mothers of their children provide the bulk of childcare within the family.

The findings of the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey (2012) highlight that, between 2004 and 2012, alongside changes in labour market participation, a traditionalist view of men as 'breadwinners' and women as 'homemakers' has declined. The survey found that in 2004 only 16 per cent of men in paid work and 14 per cent of women in paid work agreed that men are the primary financial providers. In comparison, in 2010, this view was even less popular with only 10 per cent of working men and 9 cent of working women agreeing (ibid). However, the survey also reveals that a much larger group of workers of both sexes feel that women should be prepared to give family responsibilities greater priority than paid work. The proportion of employed women who agree remained unaltered at 40 per cent since 2004 to 2012. Interestingly, it is men's level of agreement that has reportedly declined from 36 per cent to 31 per cent, with evidence documenting men's less traditionalist view of women's roles (ibid). The BSA survey (2012) observed a decline in the proportion of workers (both sexes) who regard men as priority breadwinners, yet found no accompanying drop among women, in the proportion who believe that a woman should be prepared to cut down on paid work for the sake of her family.

The OECD's (2007) international comparative research on work-family reconciliation note that female employment, particularly maternal employment has been formalised with targets of in excess of 60% of female employment within each member state by 2010. Some commentators have interpreted this trend as

an intensification of women's dual burden as both economic providers and caregivers (Ellison et al, 2009) (I go on to discuss this point later as I draw together qualitative and quantitative data to critically examine constructions of carer and worker).

## **2.5 Positioning micro-level data alongside macro-level data<sup>16</sup> to inform the policy landscape**

As I make clear in chapter one, *Introducing the thesis*, throughout this study, I aim to position macro-level data alongside micro-level data. In this chapter, I do this by, critically reviewing the UK work-family reconciliation policy landscape in early twenty-first century (macro-level data). Later, in chapters five, six and seven, I analyse working parents' interview talk about their working and caring practices (micro-level data).

According to Edwards and Gillies (2012) policy makers have historically used large scale data sources to develop a general picture of work and caring participation to assess the impact of policy intervention. They argue that, macro quantitative studies appropriate the concept of 'the family' based on the contested constructions of a heterosexual, two parent nuclear family with a breadwinning husband and father and a home-making wife and mother (ibid). In fact, large scale research designs have traditionally oversimplified family structures (Smart and Shipman, 2004) thus providing limited opportunity to capture the complexities of gendered care and work participation. In this thesis I adopt an alternative focus to the traditional macro studies approach of studying families as units. Instead I focus on mothers' and fathers' interview talk about their working and caring<sup>17</sup> practices. I argue that, whilst the macro picture highlights changes to work and care participation, it is important to analyse the fine grained micro data on how mothers and fathers talk about this caring and working participation. By doing so, I

---

<sup>16</sup> Micro-level (small- scale) and macro-level (large scale) have been considered ,with examples of research studies, in chapter one.

<sup>17</sup> Throughout the thesis, I refer to working parents caring practices to mean caring for their children. Unless I state otherwise, I am focusing on informal caring of their children only. I am not focusing on informal caring of older relatives, friends or any others.

aim to make links between discourses of caring and working in both interview talk and policy. This enables me to capture evidence of the discourses available to working parents and how these are discursively managed in their talk which I explain fully in chapter four.

Both micro-level data and macro-level data have been used by work-family scholars to question gendered caring and working practices. In her review of large scale mainstream studies (macro-level), O'Brien (2005: 25) points out 'thorny gender equity issues remain, particularly in relation to the implementation of family leave and flexible working practices for fathers.' In Miller's longitudinal qualitative studies of mothers and fathers respectively, she illuminates the complex narratives of caring and working her interviewees share using richly descriptive accounts (Miller, 2005; 2010). Arendell's (2000) review of motherhood scholarship across a decade traces studies both on the macro and micro level of research focusing on mothering practices and experiences. Fathering and shared care between mothers and fathers was examined by O'Brien (2005) who notes that there is a general consensus across both qualitative and quantitative data that 'Fathers generally have greater earning power; public childcare provision is of uneven quality; and caring preferences and practices differ between individual men and women.' (2005: 25) In addition, recent qualitative research focusing on first time mothers living in the UK present rich detailed insights into mothering practices in early twenty-first century UK (Thomson et al, 2011).

The primarily qualitative mixed method approach in Hauari and Hollingworth's (2009) study of masculinity, diversity and change found that that the notion of the breadwinning father was endorsed by parents and children across the 29 families in their sample. Their research design provided fine grained data analysis illuminating the complexity of fathering. Namely, breadwinning father was less discrete and instead fathering was seen to incorporate both financial provider and caring responsibilities. This concurs with similar research findings on fathers, employment and family life undertaken a decade earlier by Warin, Solomon, Lewis and Langford (1999). Interestingly, Warin et al. (ibid) suggest that some quantitative data underestimates a father's contribution to domestic work and caring alongside the established provider identity. Featherstone (2009) and Dermott (2008) have raised questions about the British Household Panel Survey

which focuses on the household as a unit of analysis. They argue that this large data set lacks clarity over what is defined as fatherhood and fathering (Featherstone 2009; Dermott, 2008). Thus, the complexity of fathering, (including biological and non-biological parenting relationships) are not fully examined in the British Household Panel Survey.

Alternatively, Doucet's (2006) book, *Do Men Mother?* provides a rich qualitative evidence base of fathering practices from a diverse group of men. In addition, Philip's study of non-co-resident fathers illustrates how changes in marital relationships impact the caring and working responsibilities of many fathers. In her small scale qualitative study of fathers post separation, Philip (2013) found that the fathers she interviewed made an association between breadwinning and being a good parent, but this breadwinning was not always seen as exclusively fathers' roles. Fathers, Philip (ibid) states, often presented a shared caring responsibility between mothers and fathers. Henwood et al. (2008) argued that their longitudinal qualitative study of 'men as fathers' study enabled the identification of a further tension between the way men as fathers can distance themselves from the imposing figure of the traditional father and favour a narrative of progression, while sometimes also reversing time and cultural transition. Furthermore, Gatrell's (2005) small-scale interview based sociological examination of the work-family reconciliation found that dual earner families were more likely to talk about an egalitarian division of caring responsibilities when interviewed.

Also important when reviewing existing studies on work-family are large-scale macro-level studies across countries. One example is Lynne Prince-Cooke's (2011) international comparison of work-care reconciliation policy development in Australia, East and West Germany, Spain, UK and USA. She used quantitative comparative analysis to examine gendered working and caring participation of mothers and fathers (ibid). Similarly Sayer and Gornick (2012) took an international comparative research approach. They analysed nationally representative time diary data from nine countries with different gendered working time regimes (ibid). They found that employment hours influence child care time. Namely, parents in countries with high maternal employment rates, long work hours among mothers and fathers and limited family policies have a deficit in child care time (ibid).

International qualitative case studies have been significant in stimulating discussion about work-family reconciliation in different countries. Gambles et al (2006) as part of the *Looking Backwards to Go Forwards* project presented rich insights into work-family integration in seven countries. Lewis and den Dulk (2008) provide valuable international data examining the multiple layers of context of parent's experiences of flexible working arrangements. They advocate a much needed growth in cross-national research citing dynamic globalisation processes impacting on working practices.

In summary, to critically review the work-family reconciliation policy landscape I have considered both macro-level and micro-level, qualitative and quantitative evidence which suggests that changes in labour force participation and unpaid caring provide a complex picture of working mothers and fathers caring and working practices. The old orthodoxy of quantitative versus qualitative in academic debates regarding research methods, methodology and epistemology have been critiqued by feminist scholars and researchers for decades. In their seminal work on researching women's lives from a feminist perspective, Maynard and Purvis (1994:14) advocated a rethinking of this polarization, arguing that this polarization 'impoverishes research'. On issues such as paid work and gender, they supported the call for breadth and depth of research. Lewis and den Dulk (2008) have more recently stimulated debates about the importance of international work-family research to extend research horizons. This includes arguing for a wider recognition of the more egalitarian Scandinavian welfare models as progressive to work-life balance debates.

Whilst in this thesis my empirical data is a fine grained analysis of micro-level qualitative interview talk, here I have outlined existing research to argue that they can complement each other in developing breadth and depth of knowledge on the participation of mothers and fathers in paid work and caring. Having outlined this data, I move on to review the development of work-family reconciliation policy in the UK. I do, however, return to debates regarding qualitative and quantitative research in chapter four as I consider what constitutes knowledge and how my own positioning on these issues of method, methodology and epistemology have shaped this thesis.

## 2.6 Flexible Working

Given the (re)configuration of paid work and caring participation of mothers and fathers as evidenced above, the argument for the need for work-family reconciliation policy in the UK has been convincing. Lewis and Campbell (2007b) suggest that, in UK, the development and implementation of work-family policy faltered in comparison to other EU member states (as I have discussed above). Due to the UK Government's historical reluctance to legislate family life, the relationship between family policy and employment policy in the UK has been complex (ibid). Hantrais (2004) notes that for policy to be described as work-family policy, the family would need to be the deliberate target of specific actions, with measures initiated designed to have an impact on family resources and, ultimately, on family structure.

For Daly (2010) this includes work-family reconciliation measures such as parents having the right to request flexible working from their employer under the Work and Families Act (2006). Daly (2010) identifies a range of family policy initiatives driven by the Labour Party's election in 1997. These included, changes to early years and education, financial support in the form of family tax credits, the integration of services such as Sure Start<sup>18</sup> and parental employment activation (Welfare to work reform and New Deal for lone parents<sup>19</sup>). Daly (ibid) concedes that, these policy developments extended in several directions, forming part of wider model of citizenship including notions of responsible parenting framed, by economic responsibility and social integration. The Work and Families Act (2006) was a key piece of UK legislation on work-family reconciliation. Edwards and

---

<sup>18</sup> The Labour Government's Sure Start initiative was established in 1999 to focus on providing integrated early years services primarily targeted on disadvantaged groups and local areas assessed under the programme as deprived. Often Sure Start centres provided support for formal (such as child minders) and informal (parents and grandparents) carers of children with intervention in family life including parenting classes (Hirsch and Miller, 2004)

<sup>19</sup> After the election of 1997, The Labour Government implemented programmes entitled Welfare to work reform and New Deal for lone parents. Both of these aimed to reduce the number of unemployed individuals claiming state benefit and increase the number of individuals in paid work, lone parents were a particular target (Hirsch and Miller, 2004).

Gillies (2012: 66) note that, this policy focuses on good parenting as the bedrock 'for a good society of the future'. For the purpose of this thesis, I focus specifically on work-family reconciliation whilst recognising that all of the aforementioned areas of policy are interrelated in their influence on the everyday lives of the parents interviewed in this study. I now turn to consider flexible working within work-family reconciliation policy.

The Flexible Working Taskforce (2009) was instigated with a remit to examine working hours and patterns of labour force participation. Formalised in *Building Britain's Recovery* (DWP, 2009) its purpose was to 'set out measures that will support people to balance work with their family life' (DWP, 2009: 13). As part of this was a consideration of the challenges to improving the availability and quality of working practices to aid work-family reconciliation— focusing on working hours and patterns – and providing recommendations for change. This dovetailed previous legislative changes<sup>20</sup>, namely the extension of parental leave and right to request flexible working practices. The Flexible Working Taskforce provided a series of recommendations based on the belief that;

The social benefits of increasing flexible working opportunities are clear. Enabling more people to work flexibly will improve their lives by providing a better balance between work and home. It will also reduce the number of people dependent on benefits, reduce the number of children of working parents who live in poverty, enable older workers to stay in the labour market, and enable carers to balance their caring responsibilities with paid work and help employees in general to have a better work–home balance. (Department of Work and Pensions, 2010: 30)

The Flexible Working Taskforce aimed to explore working hours and work patterns, both formal and informal sets of terms and conditions designed to enable employees to combine family responsibilities with paid employment (DWP, 2009, 2010). It identified a wide range of practices including flexible hours of work (job sharing, part-time work and flexi-time), leave entitlements (parental leave and career break) and financial assistance (child care, maternity pay). Edwards and Gillies (2012) have argued that family life and parenting have been under an ever-intensifying spotlight through explicitly focused work-family reconciliation policy

---

<sup>20</sup> This includes The Employment Rights Act 1996 / 2002, The Employment Relations Act (1999, 2004) and The Work and Families Act 2006.



intervention and sanction. They note that they are homogeneous and exclusionary because they are constructed on a template of a white, middle class, able-bodied heterosexual married couple with children (ibid). Work-family reconciliation policy does not necessarily meet the needs of more diverse families and kinship groups (Pratesi and Runswick-Cole, 2011), lone parent families (Gillies, 2006; May, 2008) or families with informal caring responsibilities for children with disabilities or other groups (Runswick-Cole and Goodley, 2011). In fact, for many diverse families, a troubled or broken family discourse is mobilised inferring a need for the family to be normalised to fit with the narrow version of family constructions within family-friendly policy (Gillies, 2006)

According to Gillies (2005) the good parent construct is mobilised more readily by successive UK governments to present a gender neutral parent construct opposed to the gendered mother and father constructs. The flexible working policy agenda formed part of wider emphasis on the on-going commitment by successive UK governments to the good parent construction which normalises parents to be both economically active and available to meet their care responsibilities (Milner, 2010). Dex (2004) states that work-family reconciliation policy agenda, driven by economic policy goals, emphasizes the good parent as economically active regardless of their biography. In criticism of the good parent construct, Gillies (2005) argues that in government policy documents, social class and other social categories are unrecognised as significant influences in the ability to be an economically active parent.

Recommendations made by the Flexible Working Taskforce in *Flexible Working: working for families, working for business* (2009) centre on a business case for choosing to focus on flexible working as opposed to leave entitlements, financial assistance or improved childcare services

Given our remit, we have chosen to focus on flexible working rather than broader issues such as parental leave, maternity pay and childcare provision. Clearly these issues are important, but to add value in the time available and to properly focus on family friendly working hours it was agreed we would concentrate on flexible working. (DWP, 2009: 14)

The Department of Work and Pensions suggestion that flexible working could 'add value' fits with the Government's approach to establish a statutory minimum framework of rights alongside convincing employers 'added value'. Gambles et al (2006: 27) note that, flexible working initiatives have tended to be 'short termist and individualistic'. Alongside this, Government's work-family policies (including flexible working) have to be implemented at workplace level thus they are often undermined by working practices, structures, cultures and wider societal norms (ibid). The Institute of Fiscal Studies (2011) suggest rising unemployment together with widespread government spending cuts and tax hikes have posed challenges to work-family reconciliation initiatives.

In their international case study project of Work-Life Balance, Gambles et al (2006) found that individuals feared their flexible working would make them more vulnerable to job loss during periods of economic instability. Equally for those people without paid work, requesting flexible working and more broadly, reconciling work and family, became a misnomer. Thus, the policy expectations that parents be both economically active and available to meet their care responsibilities has become increasingly problematic within the changing landscape of early twenty-first century Britain. Whilst the economic policy goals continue to drive the social, political and economic landscape of the UK, Dalia Ben-Galim (2011a, 2011b, 2011c) noted that women disproportionately experience the greatest impact of the rising unemployment, tax hikes and spending cuts. Ben-Galim (ibid) writing for the Institute of Public Policy suggested that, the Coalition government should re-evaluate existing economic centric policy goals due an increased need for publicly funded initiatives to support families.

## **2.7 Problematizing gender within policy discourse**

Linking back to my earlier discussion of gendered constructs embedded in work-family discourse, Lewis and Guillari (2005) note that, within work-family reconciliation policy there has been a shift towards an adult worker model family based on the premise of gender neutrality. As families and workplaces have changed so has the distribution of paid work and types of opportunities for individuals to be economically active:

There is now agreement in the literature that the male breadwinner model family, in which men took primary responsibility for earning and women for the unpaid work of care, has been substantially eroded. (Lewis 2001a cited in Lewis and Giullari, 2005: 77).

The policy discourse constructs the good parent as economically active within the labour market. In part, this is due to competitive pressures of the global economy, work related policy regulation and state welfare systems, all of which have transformed policy discourse of working and caring (Featherstone, 2009). However, gender inequality still exists in men and women's caring and paid work participation (OECD, 2010). Despite the positioning in the policy of the economically active good parent construct, the commitment to gender neutrality and equality in paid and unpaid work needs to go much further (Gillies, 2005). Smithson and Stokoe (2005) have noted that, despite the increasingly gender-neutral language of work-family policy discourses, these maintain or encourage gendered practices within the workplace.

Feminist scholars have long argued in favour of women's financial independence through women's increased participation in the labour market (Saul, 2003), however, for many feminists, the pursuit of gender equality continues (Campbell, 2014). In particular, although the traditional male breadwinner family construct has been eroded and wives can no longer be excluded from the labour market or subordinated to their husbands for social security entitlements and tax; there are still gender inequalities with sex segregation<sup>21</sup> in the labour market and the gender pay gap<sup>22</sup> (The Fatherhood Institute, 2010). Marriage as an institution may have lost some of its power to subordinate women but the same cannot be said for motherhood (Cahusac and Kanji, 2013). Motherhood and caring responsibilities for children continues to negatively impact women's social position opposed to men's in the workplace with the gender pay gap presenting an enduring reminder of this (Budig and England, 2001).

---

<sup>21</sup> The Fatherhood Institute (2010) state that sex segregation in the labour market can be identified by the concentration of men or women in particular employment areas. I discuss this further in chapter three.

<sup>22</sup> The gender pay gap is the male-female income difference in paid work. This is considered critically, particularly with reference to the motherhood penalty (Budig and England, 2001) in chapter three.

In tracing the gendered dualism of carer and breadwinner, Dex (2004: 436) argues that, '[n]orms of social life that used to be seen as neutral have been shown to have a male gender.' Historically, being economically active outside the home was normative practice based on assumptions about "the ideal worker" (Saul, 2003: 34). This "ideal worker" was characteristically a male worker (Lewis, 1997) and thus the male breadwinner construct was opposed to the female caregiver. Hartman (1976) used historical data from the nineteenth century onwards to argue a foundational theoretical statement on patriarchal segregation. She found that organised male labour confined women to low paid unskilled work in the labour market or unpaid work in the home. By examining the long tradition of interaction between patriarchy<sup>23</sup> and capitalism, Hartmann (1976) recommended,

'In attacking both patriarchy and capitalism we will have to find ways to change both society-wide institutions and our most deeply ingrained habits. It will be a long, hard struggle' (Hartmann, 1976 cited in Jackson and Scott, 2002: 106)

Decades have passed since Hartmann's prediction but contemporary research findings appear to highlight that these deeply ingrained gendered practices of working and caring remain prevalent. Saul Mather (2003: 8) reviewed the work-family policy landscape stating:

[A]s it currently stands, the best paid jobs and most secure jobs have requirements that are difficult to meet for anyone who is a primary caregiver for small children....Women are, statistically far more likely than men to be primary childcare providers. In addition, women, in general, undertake by far the greater proportion of household labour.

Crompton (2006) and Featherstone (2009) note that, in Britain, the most prevalent family constitution is the one-and-a-half breadwinner family with women more likely to work part-time and participate in more household tasks than men.

According to international comparative research of the impact of the introduction of parental leave rights in 1999<sup>24</sup>, den Dulk (2001) stated that, there has been some evidence that UK work-care arrangements have been transformed since the later

---

<sup>23</sup> Hartmann's (1976) early work on Capitalism, Patriarchy and Job Segregation by Sex' defines patriarchy as a social system of male dominance. According to Bradley (2013), patriarchy developed in 1970s as the main theoretical framework of gender analysis.

<sup>24</sup> This is in compliance with the European Union Directives.

twentieth century with perceived reduced rigidity of gendered divisions of labour. However, more recent global comparisons of gendered caring and working practices in the Fairness for Families Report Index (The Institute of Fatherhood, 2010; OECD, 2010) clearly identify gender differences in the UK across a broad range of work and care research indicators. The report's findings reveal that, 'the UK is lagging behind most upper-income countries in establishing a framework for parenting and earning to be shared<sup>25</sup>.' (The Fatherhood Institute, 2010: 5). For instance, Lewis and den Dulk's (2008) cross national EU project of flexible work arrangements noted that in countries where the welfare state is based on an equality gender contract such as Norway, there is substantially more support for working parents. They identified Norway, in particular, as experiencing a growth in fathers' involvement in parenting, encouraged by government policies and campaigns raising expectations of shared parenting (ibid)<sup>26</sup>. Additionally, as Dermott (2008) concedes, changes and continuities in the working and caring responsibilities are different for fathers and mothers in the UK. For example Dermott (ibid) disputes suggestions that significant numbers of fathers are participating in part-time and reduced hour employment often associated with a 'female model' of work-family reconciliation.

Although these arguments do not simplistically support the continuing significance of the breadwinner model of fathering, it does offer insights into the change and continuities of fathering and mothering as inter-related yet different practices. (I discuss these arguments further in the following chapter). Within the context of this chapter, I suggest that, a discourse of parent rather than mother and / or father obscures important differences in the construction and experience of caring practices and discourses whilst, also, underplaying their interrelation (Smart and May 2004; Smart, Neale and Wade, 2001). As I have earlier discussed, whilst there was optimism about the shift from work-family to work-life and its envisaged refocusing away from women to women and men (Lewis, 2010), evidence

---

<sup>25</sup> Shared in this sense is described as between mother and father. In this thesis I discuss this homogenized universalised notion of family with reference to Morgan (1996).

<sup>26</sup> Whilst I have chosen to focus on Anglo-American context and Anglo-American feminist scholarship, it is important to recognise the Scandinavian context and the valuable Scandinavian feminist scholarship contributing to these debates. A full discussion of this extends beyond this thesis remit.

suggests that work-family reconciliation policy mobilises the gender neutral parent construct whilst systemic cultural gendered inequalities remain unchanged. Featherstone (2009) argues that, men and women should work together to challenge government sponsored language of the good parent and fight for social policies that support their needs as gendered mothers and fathers. In doing so, naming mothers and fathers as such, rather than as parents, can problematize gendered assumptions embedded in policy and practice. O'Brien (2005) notes that, the importance of fathers in caring for children needs on-going consideration in UK work-family policy. Equally, Gatrell (2005) argues, women are significant yet continued to be overlooked within the labour market in many ways. Suffice to say, the scholarship reviewed here has illuminated examples in which both mothers and fathers have been described in policy using gender neutral terms of parent. These are considerations I extend in chapter three.

## **2.8 Positioning caring and working in work-family reconciliation policy**

As I revisit the aim of this chapter, namely to critically review early twenty-first century UK work-family reconciliation policy landscape, it is important to consider the positioning of caring and working within the policy. Sigle-Rushton and Kenney (2004) reviewed work-family policy in fifteen European Union countries, stating that, unlike some EU countries that have a dual earner-state carer arrangements, the UK traditionally has 'strong opposition to state interference in family, often opposing EU legislation on maternity leave, parental leave, work organization and child-care.' (2004: 470) The UK has reluctantly accepted some EU directives however these are minimal compared to many other EU countries<sup>27</sup> (Gambles et al, 2006; Milner, 2010). Furthermore despite gender mainstreaming commitments within EU policy directives, UK policy compares poorly by reinforcing traditional gendered caring and working constructs rather than moving towards a dual earner – dual carer family construct (Sigle-Rushton and Kenney, 2004). The UK welfare system encourages parents to be economically active. Women are often employed part-time, providing a disproportionate amount of informal care to

---

<sup>27</sup> As stated above, Lewis and den Dulk (2008) present a cross national case study of these differences.

families (Daly, 2010). This care is often provided by the state in other dual earner –state carer countries such as Denmark, Sweden and Finland (OECD, 2010). The UK Government's policy emphasis is on economic gains in terms of women's employment, tax revenues and reduced benefit claims with limited state provided childcare or overall support of unpaid care work for male or female caregiver (Daly, 2010).

Budig and England (2001) describe the motherhood penalty in which women's pay, career opportunities and standard of living drops after childbearing in comparison to men's. They argue that as women still unfairly carry the burden of caring, policies need to address the issue of informal caring as well as on the position of women in the labour market (ibid). Many commentators have argued caring should not subordinate to economic goals within family policy (Driver and Mitchell, 2002, Dean, 2007).

Suzan Lewis (1997) was an early proponent of the debates on the relationship between paid work and caring. She referred to the 'business case' (1997:19) to consider the ways in which 'family-friendly' policies are evaluated. The business case draws on the argument that adopting these policies should be integrated within an organisations broader strategy of change management within a global marketplace. The focus of the business case involves organisations analysing the economic costs and benefits of adopting work-family reconciliation policies. Dex and Scheibl (1999) focused on business performance in their recommendations to organisations considering 'family-friendly' policies. These recommendations were that organisations should await longer term benefits from flexible working with resultant improvements to profits being reaped more quickly and easily within larger firms than small and medium sized companies.

Following a similar focus on business performance, research from The Third Work Life Balance Survey of employers (Hooker, Neathey, Casebourne and Munro, 2006) found that 38 per cent of employers reported that flexible working had a positive effect on absenteeism and 42 per cent reported that it had a positive effect on labour turnover including retention of female staff. The Confederation of British Industry (2009) also asked employers about the impact of granting requests for flexible working specifically in regard to recruitment and retention. 63 per cent

said that flexible working practices had a positive effect on recruitment and retention. Similarly, The Flexible Working Taskforce (2009) found that employers report savings from the introduction of flexibility within work-family reconciliation policy. In addition, Gambles' et al (2006) research work-life balance within seven diverse countries found that, there were many, often unfounded, business case fears across seven diverse countries associated with the adoption of a more flexible working environment. They revealed that the business case could be used to argue that, despite employers early fears that flexible arrangements would amount to a saturation of flexible working requests, this was not borne out by research (ibid).

Collectively, these report findings highlight the UK government's explicit focus on the business case. As I have stated earlier, from early family-friendly policies (Lewis, 1997) to more recent flexible working policies (DWP, 2009), the business case has been omnipresent within work-family policy discourse. From the 1990s, the UK's reluctance to adopt work-family reconciliation policy to the same level as other EU states has maintained and preserved the cultural value of paid employment (in the following chapter I suggest that this has been established over centuries). In her early treatment of 'family-friendly' policies, Suzan Lewis (1997) made a convincing case for the need to elevate the cultural value of caring and family responsibilities to an equal level to that of paid work. Thus, having met aim one of this thesis by critically understand early twenty-first century UK work-family reconciliation policy landscape, in the following chapter, I consider the need to breakdown enduring gendered assumptions of paid work and caring embedded in policy. In doing so, I argue that there is a need to challenge the assumptions about their cultural value in the UK. I concur with Lewis (1997) that, whilst traditional gendered constructs of worker and carer remain embedded within notions of working and caring, UK work-family reconciliation policies will continue to have an inequitable gendered framework.

Within the UK, differential parental leave entitlements of maternity leave and paternity leave have become stark reminders of enduring assumptions of gendered divisions of paid work and caring deeply entrenched culturally, socially and within policies (Misra, Budig and Boeckmann, 2011). In many senses, the challenge for work-family reconciliation (with reference to the UK focus of this



study) is to develop a discourse in which the complex needs of both men and women who have caring and working responsibilities are considered. This would present opportunities to acknowledge the enduring prevalence of the male breadwinner whilst, questioning the enduring assumptions about workplace competence, the ideal worker and valuing stereotypically masculine ways of working constructed as individualistically, competitively and hierarchically (Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher and Pruitt, 2002). In the following chapters I discuss this further, drawing together my research findings and discussing how these can inform policy.

## **2.9 Summary**

Greenhaus (2003), in his contribution to the leading international work and family researchers network online encyclopaedia, identifies a variety concepts used by policymakers, researchers, practitioners and scholars to consider the relationship between work and family. In doing so, he acknowledges that the relationship between work and family is a complex one.

Because work and family lives have a profound influence on one another, understanding the linkages between work and family roles has important implications not only for organizations and individuals, but also for educators and researchers interested in this area. With the growing representation of women in the workforce and a blurring of traditional gender-based roles, both men and women are confronted with the daily challenge of handling their work and family responsibilities in a way that meets the needs of their family as well as their employer. (Greenhaus, 2003: online)

With this in mind, I began this chapter by making clear the key concepts of this study, namely, work-life, work-family, work-life balance and work-family reconciliation. I drew on a range of key literature debating the use of these concepts, critically considering the development of these concepts within the UK work-family policy context. I moved on to rationalise my choice to focus on work-family reconciliation policy whilst considering the problematic nature of the concept itself.

Here I have focused on aim one of this thesis, to critically review early twenty-first century UK work-family reconciliation policy landscape. This was met, in part, by tracing the development of UK work-family policy between the 1990s and early twenty-first century. Furthermore I reviewed existing data on mother's and father's labour force participation within early twenty-first century UK. The qualitative and quantitative data I have reviewed portrays a complex picture of the work-family reconciliation policy landscape in which working parents, mothers and fathers, practice care and work.

I have focused on work-family reconciliation policy using Daly's (2010) framing of this as one of six areas within UK family policy. With reference to flexible working, I have presented clear arguments for the need to critically examine gender and discourse within the context of work-family reconciliation policy in early twenty-first Britain. I argue that the relationship between caring and working as practices and discourses should be examined to consider more specifically the relationship between gender, discourse and working parent's working and caring practices. Later in the thesis I pick up the key points I have made here in chapter two. I now turn to chapter three which focuses on aim two of the thesis; *to critically understand the historical, social and cultural context of gendered working and caring practices and discourses*. Chapters five, six and seven move to focus on meeting aim three through my analysis of working parent's interview talk about their working and caring practices.

## Chapter Three - Gender, paid work and care

### 3.1 Introduction

In chapter two I reviewed the development of work-family reconciliation policy in the UK to argue that the policy landscape evolved within processes of social, political and economic change. Notably, between the 1990s and 2000s, the UK witnessed policy discourses of family-friendly and work-family, focused on women, especially mothers (Gambles et al , 2006). As part of this were assumptions about family practices. In this chapter I focus on gendered assumptions about who does what within the family and within the labour market (Morgan, 1996). In other words, caring for children are practices parents (historically mothers) do within their family unit thus caring practices are of central concern to work-family policy.

Here I move on to aim two of the thesis, namely, to critically examine the historical, social and cultural context of gendered working and caring practices and discourses. To meet this aim I begin by reviewing Anglo-American feminist scholarship located within the twentieth and early twenty-first century which has focused on the relationship between gender, paid work and informal caring. I note that, feminist scholarship has been spotlighting inequalities between men and women in Anglo-American societies for centuries<sup>28</sup>. Numerous feminist scholars argue industrialisation (late eighteenth and early nineteenth century), as a historical event, was significant in changing work and family as institutions. Thus, industrialisation provides a starting point to historicize my review of gendered working and caring practices and meet aim two of the thesis. (Here I interpret Scott's (1998) concept of 'historicize', as the critical examination of the historical development of gendered care and work practices contextualised over time and place.)

---

<sup>28</sup> As I have noted earlier, Anglo-American context has been my chosen focus however, I recognise the valuable contribution Scandinavian feminist scholarship has made to knowledge about gender, care, work and family.

In this chapter I also discuss the historical, cultural and social development of gender trajectories of caring and working often cited in contemporary<sup>29</sup> studies about gender, work and care in early twenty first century Britain. For instance, in research commissioned by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, on *Work and care: a study of modern parents*, Ellison, Barker and Kulasuriya (2009) found that, whilst the majority of parents do not hold what might be considered traditional values on gendered binaries of caring and working, in practice, work-family practices follow traditional gendered trajectories. Reviewing this amongst other contemporary research studies in this chapter, I ask, what are these traditional gendered trajectories and how have they been established historically in Anglo-American societies? To do so, I historicize the concepts of gender, care, work and family early in the chapter (Irving, 2008; Steedman, 2005; Scott, 1994) drawing on Anglo-American feminist scholarship<sup>30</sup> on gender, work and family located within the twentieth and early twenty-first century.

The feminist scholarship and feminist activism I consider in this chapter is, to a large degree, dictated by its prevalence in the extant evidence on gender, work and family. I acknowledge that ‘there is no simple history of *the* Western family since the sixteenth century, because there is not, nor ever has been, a single family system’ (Anderson, 1980:14 cited in McKie and Callan 2012: 83) However, I am aware that white middle class Anglo-American women dominated early first and second wave feminist activism and feminist scholarship with their ‘personal is political’ mantra (Holmes, 2009). Thus, their own experiences of managing work and family responsibilities became central to feminist scholarship and activism. Whilst I attend to the partiality of these sources by incorporating critiques of homogeneity and universality levelled at first and second wave feminist

---

<sup>29</sup> I am using the term ‘contemporary’ to refer to early twenty first century as framed by Ellison et al (2009)

<sup>30</sup> As I detailed earlier in the thesis, I used a variety of strategies to develop a sufficient breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding linked to the study. Following discussion and guidance from my supervisors, the initial stages of this study incorporated an online google scholar search using the key concepts including; work-life\*, work-family\*, feminism and gender. In addition I obtained additional resources, books, policy documents, research studies and academic journal articles, accessing bibliographies and following colleagues recommendations obtained through networks such as Community, Work and Family Journal, Psychology of Women Section of the BPS and Work and Family Researchers Network.

scholarship and activism, this chapter reviews this body of feminist scholarship and activism because it fits with the wider Anglo-American picture I am presenting in this thesis. Namely I am linking it to my chapter two review which noted that work-life and work-family concepts originated and developed within the USA and UK and as such as their meaning were situated in time and place (Lewis and Rajan-Rankin, 2013) (previously discussed in chapter two). Thus it is also the case that the feminist scholarship I review is situated in time and place as I now turn to discuss.

### **3.2 Situating gender in historical, social and cultural context of the division of labour**

Industrialisation and urbanisation in Anglo-American societies in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century has been argued as a turning point in the nature of women's and men's working lives (Wharton, 2005). For most people, societies underwent a reorganisation and transformation of the traditional ways of working and doing family. There was an expansion of factories, mills and large scale manufacturing industries against a back drop of traditional agricultural and homeworking industries within family homes and small communities and villages.

Debates by historians and feminists centre on whether women benefitted from gains in employment and higher wages or whether it narrowed women's jobs as the household economy declined (Forster, 2002). In part, these debates are fuelled by limited available evidence of the impact on caring and working practices for men and women during this historical period (Rowbotham, 2012). For instance, quantitative research on the impact of changes on women was limited as women were often only identified as widow, spinster or servant (ibid). Also there were gaps in evidence about minority and working class lives. Working class women and minority groups made up a large proportion of the workforce in textiles, metal wares and potteries and their rates of pay were less than men's (McIvor, 2013). However, low levels of literacy, together with inaccessible and unavailable means of publishing their accounts of working and caring, meant that their lives were often unrecorded (Forster, 2002). Thus, most of the evidence on

the impact of industrialisation and urbanization centred on white middle class caring and working practices. Wharton (2005) notes:

Despite the fact that many working-class and minority women were employed for pay, the experiences of the middle class became the basis for cultural norms and employer practices that defined the workplace and workers as 'male' (2005: 86).

The physical separation of work and family that accompanied industrialisation impacted the middle classes significantly through the process of domains distinction between women caring in the home and men working in the public (Irving, 2008). Historians have called this the doctrine of separate spheres with the sexual division of labour assigning men to the labour force and women to the home.

Throughout the history and the world, divisions of labor have developed along the lines of sex. Hence, while work is an activity performed historically by both women and men, sex in virtually all societies has been an important basis of societal organization. The sexual division of labor thus refers to the process through which tasks are assigned on the basis of sex (Wharton, 2005: 82)

During this period of industrialisation there was a combination of factory legislation, the activities of male trade unionists and an increasing pervasive ideology of the male breadwinner which reinforced women's position as subordinate to men's in the paid workforce (McIvor, 2013). Thus the sexual division of labour was entrenched in the social structures of family and work in Anglo-American societies (ibid). Lawthom (1999: 68) summarises this as a period in which identities and practices changed as new meanings were attached to work and non-work 'often recast and over-simplified as the public and private domain...with consequent values attached'.

Feminist historian Scott (1994) argues that the feminist challenge to this division of labour was lengthy and complex. For instance, the early writing of Mary Wollstonecraft (1792 cited in Berges, 2013) challenged the notion of women's 'inherent sentimentality' predisposing them to mothering and positioning them as inherently inferior to men. She famously questioned the education system of her time suggesting it was bound to the wider problem of labour division in both the private and public domains (ibid). Wollstonecraft's writing confronted women's

marginalisation, forming part of a long and complex history of feminist activism and quest for equal rights alongside the work of others such as Lucietta Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Charlotte Perkins Gilman and John Stuart Mill.

History is punctuated with a limited number of well-known examples where feminist activism challenged inequalities between men and women. Included in these popular cultural accounts is that of suffragette Emily Wilding Davison who died after walking in front of the King George V's horse whilst she was campaigning for women's right to vote. Significantly, I personally learnt about the event of Emily Davidson's death as a pupil of the National Curriculum GCSE history<sup>31</sup> in 1980s (in a English, secondary comprehensive mixed sex school). In an hour long history lesson Emily's death was described to me with brevity. I remember feeling a sense of dissatisfaction when, in the following history lesson, the teacher had already moved on to another topic rather than teach more about Emily's death and its part of a wider social movement for gender equality. My history lessons gave little instruction and enlightenment of feminist scholarship or the debates around the origins of the sexual division of labour and its interplay with inequalities between men and women which Emily and the suffragettes challenged. According to Burns and Walker (2005) malestream knowledge has historically reinforced male privilege. Personally I believe my own history lesson experiences symbolise missed opportunities to learn about feminist scholarship and feminist activism whilst at school. In particular I was not encouraged to think critically about gender or the sexual division of labour. Now, as I look back on this personal experience, I construct it as shaping my personal biography and my commitment to learning more about feminism (in the broadest sense) over my lifetime.

According to Rowbotham (2012), tracing the history of Anglo-American feminist scholarship and feminist activism exposes a lively debate about the meaning of the sexual division of labour. In it, most commentators point to biological determinism which implies that sex differences between binaries of male and female determine gender differences noted in man and women, masculinity and

---

<sup>31</sup> History, in the sense of meaning his story. It left me questioning, what about her story?

femininity (West and Zimmerman, 1987). The distinction of sex and gender has been subject to much internal debate amongst feminists (Bradley, 2013). Gender, as a concept, developed historically within feminist scholarship to examine the social relations between men and women, challenging notions of fixed differences often reduced to biological differences.<sup>32</sup>

As early first and second wave feminism developed its examination of gender, a growing body of literature developed, challenging biological determinism as a dominant discourse explaining the division of labour (Wharton, 2005). Biological determinism can be traced from the cultural prestige given to biological science since Darwin which matched femininity and masculinity with existing structures of power and privilege <sup>33</sup>(Connell, 2001). As part of this, it has been argued that biological determinism has been intertwined with the construction of motherhood and womanhood. According to Wager (2000) motherhood and womanhood have been constructed as mutually constitutive. Chodorow (1978: 71) critically discussed this by suggesting that the construction of female as women and mother have been seen as 'an obvious taken for granted, world historical fact'.

Oakley's (1972) *Sex, Gender and Society* explicitly named the distinction between sex and gender in feminist debates about men, women and the division of labour. Thus whilst feminist activists and scholars had challenged this division of labour for centuries, it was Oakley's (ibid) signposting in the name of her book that stimulated lively debates about sex, gender and society. Oakley (ibid) referred to gender as the socio-cultural aspects of being a man or a women (masculinity and femininity) and, sex, as the base of biological sex difference, male and female (ibid). Historian Joan Scott (1999: 18) noted that 'gender is a social category imposed on a sexed body'. Butler (1990) argued that the biologically determined 'sex' has, over time, been synonymized with the socially constructed 'gender'. As debates as to the relationship between sex and gender rage on internally within

---

<sup>32</sup> These biological differences have recently been challenged by Cordelia Fine (2012) in terms of physiological and anatomical differences between and amongst sexed men and women. These discussions extend outside the remit of this thesis.

<sup>33</sup> This has been coined as the patriarchal dividend by Connell (2001).



feminist scholarship I wish to make explicit my own mobilisation of gender. Whilst taking on board the work of Butler (1990) and Scott (1999) I use the following definition of gender which originated from first and second wave feminist scholars and feminist activists:

Gender refers to the varied and complex arrangements between men and women, encompassing the organization of reproduction, the sexual divisions of labour and cultural definitions of femininity and masculinity. (Bradley, 2013: 16)

Importantly, I see gender as both a social construct and social relations between men and women (Nicholson, 1990). As part of my conceptualisation I acknowledge that:

Gender depictions are less a consequence of our 'essential sexual nature' than interactional portrayals of what we would want to convey about sexual natures using conventionalized gestures. (West and Zimmerman, 1987:130).

In other words, I am suggesting that gender is performed (Butler, 1990). Goffman (1976) formulated gender displays when discussing biological determinism of sex and gender as a social construction. He noted that if gender can be defined as the culturally established correlates of sex (whether in consequence of biology or learning), then 'gender display refer to conventionalized portrayals of these correlates.' (Goffman, 1976: 69).

As part of this, masculinities and femininities describe gender identities which are plural and dynamic; changing socio-culturally and with individuals. They are not fixed traits, expressed in every social context, but instead are multiple, with individuals enacting both 'masculine' and 'feminine' performances in different contexts (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001). Notably, I must signpost that, these conceptualisations of gender and sex, together with the gender identities of masculinities and femininities, are mobilised throughout this thesis. In the forthcoming chapters I analyse working parents' interview talk. In doing so I use the concept of discourse practices and discourse resources to consider the ways in which mothers and fathers perform gender when talking about their caring and working practices. As I discuss in my final chapter, the working parents I interviewed used conventionalised constructs of parent, mother and father to position themselves in discourses of caring and working.

In addition, my conceptualisation of gender is informed by a recognition that gender relations intersect with other types of social relations including class, sexuality, age, race, ethnicity (Connell, 2001) and dis/ability (Lawthom, 1999). Thus, as I analyse the ways in which working parents talked in the interviews, I frame gender within an identity project. Thus I am assuming that mothers and fathers are gendered, raced, classed, aged, embodied and so forth. Whilst I do not suggest my participant sample was representative of diversity within Britain's population in the early twenty-first century (as is the case in Hansen et al's (2010) study of Millennium Cohort Study) in chapter four I introduce the participants, sharing the personal biographical information (including the self-assigned race, age, embodiment, class, sexuality) they disclosed during the data collection process.

Connell (2001:37) states that:

To understand gender, then we must constantly go beyond gender. The same applies in reverse. We cannot understand class, race or global inequality without constantly moving towards gender. Gender relations are a major component of social structure as a whole.

Gender conceptualisations are central to this thesis and I reiterate that my research focus was on the relationship between gender, care and work practices and discourses. However I did not close down opportunities to consider Connell's (2001) suggestion that, to develop an understanding of gender we must 'go beyond gender' to understand dominant identity discourses. When people are positioned within or outside dominant groups there is a process of 'othering'. This 'othering' forms part of the (re)construction of minority groups. Thus in this thesis I critique the saturation of white middle class women's accounts in feminist scholarship to suggest that working class and non-white people were othered, with their working and caring accounts often less visible.

My argument in adopting a critical feminist informed research framework (Lawthom, 1999) is that I recognise the multiple feminist locations within and across axes of signification and power relations. These draw on interdisciplinary debates around gender as a concept within discussions about equality and

difference across social, cultural and historic context (Zalewski, 2000). Furthermore as part of adopting a reflexive research approach I discuss the interplay of my own personal biography and social categories of race, gender, age, sexuality, dis/ability and ethnicity within qualitative research processes (Maynard and Purvis, 1994; Sallee and Harris, 2011). In my methodology chapter, I argue that:

While social locations are important, reflexivity also means actively reflecting on the ways in which these locations, as constituted by the constant interplay between social structures and agency, actually come to influence the particular approaches (methodological, theoretical, epistemological and ontological) from within which we conduct research. (Doucet, 1998: 2)

Having made clear the conceptualisation of gender and its complexity, it is important to reaffirm my usage of it to trace feminisms' critical examination of the historical, social and cultural context of the binary opposition of the mother as primary carer and the breadwinning father. The constructs of mother and father and the practices of mothering and fathering have formed the bedrock of feminist scholarship and activism on the division of caring and working labour. Over time feminists have made visible the arbitrary way in which women's biological capacity to reproduce were linked to notions of women's innate caring capacity (Wharton, 2005).

For feminist scholars such as Judith Butler (1990) femininity and masculinity are taken to be the cultural articulation of a biological sex. As part of these cultural articulations, there are assumptions about women's innate caring capacity. In other words, women's biological capacity to reproduce became linked to notions of women's 'essential' capacity to care for the child they have reproduced. Letherby (2003) has argued that, the idealised woman is constructed on notions of naturalised biological capacity to mother in terms of both reproduction and caring for the child. This construction presents itself as determined by biological makeup with an innate female maternal instinct integrated within the construction (Roper and Capdevila, 2010). According to Zalewski (2000) these are problematic assumptions that have been transmitted for millennia in Anglo-American societies, influencing women's distinct lack of opportunities (economic, legal, and social). Wharton (2005: 83) notes 'Women (and not men) give birth – a biological fact - but

women in most societies have primary responsibility for children's care and rearing'.

According to Doucet (2006) women's positioning as primary carers have also limited opportunities for men to participate in caring activities. Gender differences in culturally ascribed childcare responsibilities can be traced historically as a significant component of the gendered institutions of work and family, shaping many aspects of women's and men's work and family lives (Wharton, 2005). To reiterate, in this chapter I focus on meeting aim two of this thesis, namely, to critically examine the historical, social and cultural context of gendered working and caring practices and discourses. In attending to this specific aim, I now move on to consider feminist scholarship tracing women as workers and carers in the twentieth century.

### **3.3 Feminist scholarship tracing women as workers and carers in the twentieth century**

Feminist work of first and second wave activists was driven predominantly by white middle class feminists. My own readings of this early work included Betty Friedan (1963) Ann Oakley (1972) and Gloria Steinem (1972). As many of these first and second wave feminists themselves later recognised, 'the personal was political' thus their own determination for equality stemmed from within their own personal biography and location within the social hierarchy of social divisions (Oakley, 2005). The Women's Liberation Movement or the frequently termed 'second wave feminism' were often referred to as equality feminism (Holmes, 2009). It attempted to advance women's interests alongside a civil rights model by targeting political reform of existing social and political structures (Whitehead and Barrrett, 2001). This involved minimising differences between men and women because these differences symbolised obstacles to socio-economic equality (Featherstone, 2009).

Women seeking rights to suffrage was a key goal for first and second wave feminists because disenfranchisement was the most notable official exclusion of women, women needed the right to vote. Women finally secured the vote in

Britain on the same terms as men in 1928. For feminist activists, who were predominantly white middle class women seeking equality, women's right to vote would benefit the moral and social improvement of the entire population (Rowbotham, 2012). This was an important point because the caring and working practices of minority and working class women differed to that of white middle class women (McKie and Callan, 2012). Wharton (2005: 85) argues:

Unlike the middle class, where most women worked exclusively at home caring for their families, many working-class women combined their family responsibilities with a wage-earning job....Many members of the working class are racial minorities.

Thus whilst white middle class women were at the helm of feminist activism there was some recognition that equal rights to vote would benefit people with different social circumstances to their own. Patricia Hill-Collins (1986) notes that African American women have traditionally integrated paid work with their mothering practices. The separate spheres of male provider and female carer did not develop within African American families yet the civil rights movements and feminist activism were instrumental in exposing years of inequalities and exploitation for minority women on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean (hooks, 1989).

Feminist historian Scott (1994) argues that, the long and arduous challenge many feminist activists experienced in the 1900s was against a context of two world wars and periods of economic boom and bust. Within this context, gendered caring and working practices had an inherent fluidity with, for instance, women working in 'otherwise male jobs' whilst men were drafted for active armed service during the wars (McIvor, 2013). According to Oakley (1972), there was clear evidence of enduring expectations that white middle class women in particular would be committed to a heterosexual marriage, mothering and caring. However, in contrast, expectations on their participation in the labour market were more contingent with national circumstance of war and the economic needs. In this sense, the opportunities for these women to participate in the labour market were contingent on the supply and demand of male workers and the economic priorities of the state (McIvor, 2013). Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity is useful here in recognising the ways in which enacting gender through working and caring practices is not fixed along the binary framework of biological determinism.

In fact, during prominent historical periods in Anglo-American societies, public discourses of working and caring incorporated expectations that all women engage in the labour market (Rowbotham, 2012). Also, as I have outlined, these expectations differed for minority and working class women who had different access to varying areas of employment than middle class white women. However, overall, women across the social hierarchy were accredited with value as workers during periods of war (ibid). Women's labour was in demand in the absence of men who were in the armed forces fighting on distant shores.

Whilst women's participation in the labour market peaked during these historical periods of War in the 1900s, overall, women experienced the financial rewards and potential opportunities of independence from men through their own employment. Rowbotham (2012) describes this realization as a tide of change enthusing middle class women to see alternatives to the traditional gender trajectory of homemaker and mother. However, according to Friedan (1963) equality was elusive in the labour market. In *The Feminine Mystique* (ibid) Friedan cast criticisms of gendered inequities in the labour market and society more generally at the feet of patriarchy<sup>34</sup>. Friedan (1963) and other second-wave feminists (Rowbotham, Segal and Wainwright, 2013) argued that social institutions, such as the labour market and marriage, enslaved middle class white women in the bonds of suffocating domesticity and intensive reliance on men as providers. Friedan (1963) claimed that despite women participating in the labour market, they deserved the same privileges as men, including employment rights, pay and opportunities. Thus they questioned the positioning of women as 'Other', subordinate to men<sup>35</sup>.

---

<sup>34</sup> As I have previously noted in Hartmann's (1976) work on Capitalism, Patriarchy and Job Segregation by Sex' patriarchy is defined as a social system of male dominance. Bradley (2013) states that, patriarchy developed in 1970s as the main theoretical framework of gender analysis.

<sup>35</sup> I discuss the notion of 'Othering' later in this chapter when reviewing the work of Simone de Beauvoir

Paid work has historically been integral to the lives of working class and minority women (Bradley, 2013). Hill Collins (1990) argued that,

In contrast to the cult of true womanhood where work is defined as being in opposition to and incompatible with motherhood, work for Black women has been an important and valued dimension of Afro-centric definitions of motherhood. (Hill Collins 1990 cited in Wharton, 2005: 159).

The different experiences of women as workers and carers is eloquently presented in Margaret Forster's (2002) examination of four diverse women married to men constructed as historic figures in literature, religion, politics and social welfare between 1821 and 2001<sup>36</sup>. Forster (ibid) presents a thorough account of the complexity of women's lives as workers and carers with intersecting class, race and religious differences. However, for many second wave white middle class feminists, this complexity was oversimplified through their focus on women's (lack of) opportunities to pursue a career was a chief concern (Friedan, 1963).

As a white, middle class women, Betty Friedan felt that she did not receive the same education and employment opportunities as her white, middle class, male counterparts. Her writing contains similar sentiments to white middle class women Mary Wollstonecraft's written decades earlier (Berges, 2013). For Friedan (1963), although women's entrance into the labour market enabled women to earn their own money, the popular media representations continued to reinforce naturalised white middle class family constructs of the stay-at-home mother and the worker/provider father. In the 1950s and 1960s, representations in magazines and on television, middle class white families were targeted with messages that the only two choices available to middle class Anglo-American women were:

In that corner, the fiery, man-eating feminist, the career woman - loveless, alone. In this corner, the gentle wife and mother - loved and protected by her husband, surrounded by her adoring children. (Friedan, 1963: 164).

---

<sup>36</sup> Forster (2002) provides a historical account of the lives of the following four women who were married to famous men – Mary Livingstone (1821 – 1862) married to Missionary David Livingstone; Fanny Stevenson (1840 – 1914) married to author Robert Louis Stevenson; Jennie Lee (1904 – 1988) married to MP and founder of the NHS Auerin Bevan; herself, Margaret Forster (1938 – Present) married to author, Hunter Davies.

Thus like many other second wave feminists, Friedan argued that notions of femininity were bound up in public discourse about the good mother as an intensive caring non-working mother. Being a 'career woman' and a wife and mother, Friedan contended, was incompatible with the dominant white middle class cultural and societal norms diffuse during the 1950s and 1960s (ibid). Raddon (2002) and Pillay (2009) have more recently published subjective accounts of professional<sup>37</sup> working women who felt they had been positioned by colleagues, friends and family members within discourses of deviant mother because they had not been present to provide for their child's needs within norms of mothering.

According to Dillaway and Pare` (2008), Post World War two, the stay-at-home mother ideology became a dominant construction of the good mother through intensive mothering. On the ideology of intensive mothering, Hays (1996) considers the cultural contradictions of motherhood and paid work. Dillaway and Pare` (2008) state that cultural debates of the over-simplistic pitting of the stay-at-home mother against the working mother can be traced back decades yet continue to endure in early twenty-first century Anglo-American societies. Referring to Hays (1998) thesis on intensive mothering, Dillaway and Pare` (2008) note its similarities to second wave feminist scholarship on mothering in that it focuses on middle class white women, assuming homogeneity and universality of women's experiences of managing responsibilities of caring and working. Similarly, Lawthom's (1999: 70) critique of mainstream literature of women in work argues it focuses predominantly on professional 'power-dressed career women, thus overlooking women who are located in the lower echelons of companies or undertaking home work.'

---

<sup>37</sup> Throughout this thesis I mobilise professional to mean someone who has completed formal education and training for membership of the profession and its particular knowledge and skills necessary to perform the role of that profession. Most professionals are subject to codes of conduct enshrining rigorous ethical and moral obligations. Professional standards of practice and ethics for a particular field are typically agreed upon and maintained through widely recognized professional associations. I recognise that in some cultures, the term is linked to particular social stratum. (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003)



### **3.4 Men, Women and Othering**

In line with this is a growing body of research considering men's experiences of working and caring. This work on men and masculinity has mobilised the debated concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2001) to trace representations of men historically. King (In Press) notes that Anglo-American media representations of men and masculinity during the 1960s reinforced gendered binaries within discourses of working and caring, namely the male breadwinner and the female carer/homemaker. Whilst feminists such as Friedan focused on middle class white working women to critique normalised constructs of women as carer, King (In Press) examined evidence of men wishing to deviate from the male breadwinner father and 'family' man construct. Although written at different historical periods, both Friedan (1963) and King (In Press) problematize the normative homogenous, white middle class family framed within gendered binaries of care and work. As part of their work both Friedan (1963) and King (In Press) consider the discourse of compulsory heterosexuality embedded within constructions of the normative family. Within this discourse were expectations of a heterosexual relationship leading to reproduction along the lines of biological determinism. In other words, cultural expectations were that, a heterosexual couple would become parents and, once the child was born, the mother would be the primary carer whilst the father went out to work. (Wharton, 2005).

Malestream academic knowledge (Hearn, 2004) has historically reinforced gendered caring and working binaries by mobilising 'normative' family constructs (Stanley and Wise, 1993). According to Haraway (1988), historically, knowledge has been embedded with notions of what is worthy of note and what should be presented/sourced as universal. Within this knowledge are the hegemonic and patriarchal values associated with hierarchical ways of working and caring. As aforementioned, a central tenet of feminism scholarship and activism is that 'the personal is political' (Holmes, 2009), this involved critiquing malestream knowledge for legitimising gendered binaries of working and caring which are often experienced by women personally.

Dillaway and Pare (2008) state that, feminist scholarship looks at the personal life experiences often denied in malestream academic examination of work and family. One such example of this was Parsons and Bales' (1956) academic sociological framing of the normative family which maintained the notion of women as 'other' to men. Their functionalist structural theory (ibid) on the family drew on social Darwinism and as Letherby (2003) notes, contained inherent gender bias with women positioned as carers (expressive role) functional to men's (instrumental) public role as breadwinner provider working outside the home. Bales and Parsons (1956) awarded inherent unequal values to gendered unpaid caring and paid work. Wharton (2005) suggests that whilst Parsons (1964) and Parsons and Bales (1956) attempted to link gendered institutions of work and family, they reified the constructed gender inequalities of men and women. Morgan (1996) is one of many scholars who argued that Parsons and Bales (1956) mobilised a historically and culturally specific family with little, if any, consideration of different family types or individuals who did not meet this 'norm'.

According to Rowbotham, (2012) the breadwinner father working in the public domain has been socially and culturally naturalised as the norm of the individual, whilst women were didactically opposed to this masculinised naturalised individual. Women's positioning as the 'Other' within discourses of caring and working often associated women with the private domestic sphere where caring and domesticity were situated (Williams, 2010). The prominent feminist philosopher de Beauvoir (1949/2010) had argued that, women were problematically referred as *The Second Sex*, didactically in opposition to men through a process of 'Othering'. de Beauvoir (1949/2010: 18) argues:

She (*women*) is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she the other.

Extending de Beauvoir's (1949/2010) analyses, Butler (1990) has noted that, whilst established as dominant and culturally entrenched, 'Othering' of women can be problematized by understanding their social, cultural and historical construction. She argues that, in doing so, there are opportunities to seek alternative ways of constructing and practising caring and working in the future (ibid).

Feminist scholarship has influenced the burgeoning study of men and masculinity. In their editorial of *The Masculinities Reader*, Whitehead and Barrett (2001) note that scholarship on men and masculinities focuses on fundamental notions of alterity or 'othering'. Identity formation occurs through a process of 'Othering', marking groups (women, as well as other men) as different and excluded in binary terms to hegemonic men (ibid). Using the notion of 'the blueprint' hegemonic masculinity, Connell (2001) argues that normative definitions of masculinity such as the breadwinner provider father are never absolute or fixed. Connell goes on to recognize that different men approach norms to different degrees, inevitably producing paradoxes (ibid). Notably, Connell (2001) states that, practices, such as fathering, are culturally and socially located with historical situations, reproduced through daily action.

For scholars of men and masculinity, the debated concept of hegemonic masculinity has played a pivotal role in the development of gendered work on men, women, work and family. Carrigan, Connell, and Lee (1985: 586) characterise hegemonic masculinity; 'not as a 'the male role' but a variety of masculinities to which others –among them young and effeminate as well as homosexual men – are subordinated'. Derived from Antonio Gramsci's (1971) Marxist thinking on class relations, hegemony refers to the social, political and cultural dynamics by which particular social groups establish and sustain power.

Despite the concept of hegemony, being 'as slippery and difficult as the idea of masculinity itself' (Donaldson, 1993, p. 2), scholars interested in the study of gender systems have mobilised Gramsci's work on hegemony. A key feature of hegemonic masculinity is the ways in which particular versions of masculinity are reproduced to establish and maintain dominance in relation to others. Indeed, this formulation recognizes that 'masculinities [and femininities] come into existence at particular times and places and are always subject to change' (Connell, 1995: 185).

The concept of hegemonic masculinity has been used to study the ways in which fathers who are unemployed or unpaid carers are seen as 'other' and subordinate to the provider father (Willott and Griffin, 1997). In this sense, the established argument within feminist scholarship and feminist activism that women have been sub-ordinated to men has been influential in the more recent examination of men and masculinities. Connell (1995) notes that masculinities like femininities are not fixed entities determined by biological reductionism, but, instead, are socially, culturally and historically constructed. Feminist scholarship has been significant in influencing this knowledge and understanding of gender as social relations between men and women as workers and carers, mothers and fathers. This development in epistemologies on gender is notwithstanding the internal debates within feminist scholarship which I briefly outline in the following section.

### **3.5 Internal debates amongst feminist scholars of gender, work and care**

Feminist scholarship has provided a rich detailed history of the examination of gender in Anglo-American societies. Having traced the historical, cultural and social context of gendered binaries of caring and working, I have focused on some of the key Anglo-American feminist scholarship and activism championing the challenge to discourses of biological determinism through the mobilisation of gender as a social, cultural and historical construction. There are, however, complex histories and influences of feminist work<sup>38</sup> and criticisms have been levelled at the internal competition for authority and recognition within which women's solidarity is potentially undermined. The debates between equality and difference feminism are one such example I now discuss.

Difference feminism can be traced to Chodorow's (1978) and Ruddick's (1990) studies on mothering. Their exaltation of the normative undervalued maternal practice in Anglo-American societies was criticised for reifying constructed

---

<sup>38</sup> Letherby (2003) captures the plurality of feminism suggesting that it is not a unitary category, concept or perspective with a consistent set of ideas within an identifiable framework. It is continually under negotiation and there is not one feminism but many.

inequalities between men and women (Doucet, 2006). Both Chodorow (1978) and Ruddick (1990) made attempts to theorise motherhood without recourse to natural or biological explanations. Chodorow (1978) suggested that motherhood was entwined with notions of femininity. She argued that women transmit and reinforce a pattern of female mothering which is not biologically determined but a product of the dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship which differs from the mother-son relationship. According to Chodorow (1978) men must participate more equally in childrearing to redress the gender balance of nurturing/caring and alter the expectations around mothering. Ruddick (1990) argued that, a mother's concern for nurturing and protecting her children could be explained through 'maternal practice' rather than biological determinism.

Doucet (2006) helpfully draws the distinction between difference feminism and equality feminism, suggesting that the former focused on raising awareness and seeking recognition for caring practices traditionally associated with women whilst the latter sought equal footing with men particularly in the public domain. In doing so she recognises the complex debates amongst feminists such as Patricia Hill Collins (1990) regarding the assumed homogeneity of men and women characteristically, yet problematically, threaded through the history of feminist scholarship

The often adopted term, second-wave feminism<sup>39</sup> was also referred to as equality feminism (Holmes, 2009). It attempted to advance women's interests alongside a civil rights model by targeting political reform of existing social and political structures. The facilitation of equal employment participation for men and women was central to equality feminism. This involved minimising differences between men and women because these differences symbolised obstacles to socio-economic equality (Featherstone, 2009). Equality feminism focused on achieving equality with men in the workforce (Friedan, 1963). A substantial body of literature has developed on the place of women in work, particularly with reference to

---

<sup>39</sup> Often mobilised with reference to the Women's Liberation Movement

organisations (Bradley, 1999)<sup>40</sup>. For instance, Halford, Savage and Witz (1997) examined gender, careers and organisations to consider large scale restructuring of banking, nursing and local government. However, although this described the increasing participation of women in the workplace and problematized the 'feminisation'<sup>41</sup> of work (namely greater part-time and contract employment most notably in the service industry), women were often homogenised and universalised.

Workers (subjects; women; the proletariat), are positioned and conceptualised (objectified; positioned; oppressed, commodified and alienated) as a homogenous group. Despite the increasing representation of women in the workplace (glass ceilings and barriers withstanding) occupational psychology has progressed largely in a gender blind way, marginalizing women as workers. (Lawthom: 1999: 69)

Lawthom (1999) noted that, historically, in studies on women and work in occupational psychology (and more broadly across disciplines) was a small minority of professional career women. A recent example of this is Cahusac and Kanji's in-depth study of professional and managerial women returning to work on becoming mothers. They found that these professional women experienced feelings of being 'underpaid and undervalued in relation to their experience and previous seniority' (2014: 57). Whilst studies such as Cahusac and Kanji's (ibid) contribute to the debate about women, work and care, Lawthom's (1999) critique remains prevalent, namely that women in work are framed by 'a commonly held view that individual subjectivity can be managed by it race, sexuality, gender and disability.' (ibid: 69). Lawthom (1999) advocated critical feminist research, which recognises that:

Gender is a significant factor at work, though the way we study and interact with it must show sensitivity to the gendered nature of work experiences by all sorts of women in all types of work. (1999: 76)

---

<sup>40</sup> Whilst I recognise that the literature on women in work has been significant area for feminist debate on gender, work and family, a full treatment extends beyond this thesis. My rationale for this is contextualised within the later chapters where I discuss the absence of talk about women in work by the participants during interview.

<sup>41</sup> Bradley (1999) states that, feminization puts a lower value on women's work leading to female labour being undervalued in society. This has been linked to sex segregation in the labour market.

Feminist scholarship has been a fertile ground for studying gender and work with varying attempts made to address the challenges of difference eloquently described by Lawthom (1999). For instance, in *The Second Shift*, Hochschild (1989: 274) recognised that her interviewees were 'disproportionately middle class' however she argued that a greater problem within research on women in work was that it had historically ignored 'half the problem' (1989: xi) namely the home care and domesticity working women undertook when they left their place of work. (This 50/50 construction of work and care/family has been critically discussed in chapter two.) In their study of *Global Women: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy*, Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2003) present case studies of the entangled nature of race, class and gender when examining care and work practices for global women. Further fuelling the debates within feminism about the need to strip away the homogeneity and universalism embedded within research on gender, care and work.

In her work on mothering, Phoenix (1987), argued that, discourses of good and bad mothering are saturated with classed, racialised, aged, sexualised, 'abled' and gendered meanings. Furthermore Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) stated feminist research on family practices often validated middle class family practices, and pathologised working class ones. This has been illuminated by Dillaway and Pare's (2008) in their recent consideration of media representation of mothers in twenty-first century Anglo-American societies which pit working mothers and stay-at-home mothers in binary opposition. Mignon Moore's (2012) qualitative study of black gay women talking about their experiences of creating families also contributes rich insights to feminist literature on gender and society by highlighting the importance of recognising sexuality and race when examining women as workers and mothers.

In line with Doucet (2006) and Lawthom (1999) I recognise that women have been historically marginalised as carers and workers in Anglo-American societies. As Letherby (2003) states, feminism by its very nature, is not a unitary category, concept or perspective which encapsulates a consistent set of ideas within an

identifiable framework. It is continually under negotiation and there is not one feminism but many, including post-structural feminism.<sup>42</sup> Post-structuralism has been mobilised by academics and theorists spotlighting the study of discourse and the constructed nature of realities in language (Burr, 2003). Whilst I discuss this in detail in chapter four, I note here that, poststructuralist feminism considers discourse and the social construction of gender.

Throughout this thesis I draw on the work of Scott (1994) and Butler (1990) framed as post-structural feminism (as discussed earlier). Thus, feminisms have increasingly acknowledged the importance of recognising diversity amongst women although this continues to be a challenge for all feminist scholarship whether the focus of research is on women in work, women in care or the interplay of women, care and work (Ackerly and True, 2010).

Early feminist work cannot be underestimated however, the concept of diversity amongst women was often interpreted narrowly (Hill-Collins, 1986). With this in mind, I reiterate that this has informed my conceptualisation of gender particularly that gender intersects with other types of social relations including class, sexuality, age, race, ethnicity and dis/ability. Notwithstanding the wider discussions about how and why scholars should recognise these intersections, gender has been foregrounded in work-family research because it is central to the issues researchers are focusing on (Hochschild, 1989). In considering gender, it is important to recognise the constitutive relationship between men and women as mothers and fathers, workers and carers (ibid). In doing so, I now turn to father's working and caring practices in twenty-first century Britain to fully examine the historical, social and cultural context of gendered working and caring practices and discourses as aim two of this thesis states.

---

<sup>42</sup> Ackerly and True (2010: 18) note that post-modern feminism and post-structural feminism emerged 'as part of broader epistemological challenges that included non-feminist critical theory, postmodern, post-colonial post-structural and neo-Marxist perspectives. Each of these has its own history with feminism and multidisciplinary'. In this thesis, I use the term post-structural feminism because the literature I consider in chapter four mobilises the term post-structuralism to consider the linguistic turn and discourse analysis. In this sense, poststructuralist feminism considers discourse and the social construction of gender. I draw on the work of Butler (1990), Scott (1994) and Gergen (2013) framed as post-structural feminists.



### **3.6 Father's working and caring practices in twenty-first century Britain**

According to Featherstone (2009) historical studies reveal fatherhood to be as complex and nuanced as motherhood with similar criticisms across the scholarly literature that mothering and fathering have been overgeneralised and oversimplified historically. Marsiglio, Amato, Day and Lamb (2000) reviewed extensive and eclectic social science literature on numerous aspects of fatherhood from 1990s and beyond. They highlighted the growth in scholarship on fatherhood against a backdrop of changes in family life, gender relations, men's changing employment patterns, and increases in both women's participation in the paid labour force and men's involvement as primary non-maternal care providers (ibid). Within the context of this growing body of fatherhood literature, there is general agreement that father's experiences of working and caring are complex.

Miller (2010) notes that whilst men have been historically constructed as the ideal worker (as discussed in chapter two), defined with reference to their engagement in employment, men's involvement as fathers has been interpreted in different ways at different historical moments according to changing constructions of the 'good father'. According to O'Brien (2005), historically, research on fathering has been patchy and there has been a reliance on maternal accounts limiting the development of fathering knowledge and understanding. In her research report, *Shared Caring: Bringing fathers into the frame*, Margaret O'Brien (2005) conducted an independent review of how fathers may be supported to balance their work and family commitments. The review's aim was to redress what she described as, an often seen exclusively maternal issue of reconciling work and family life. Her report findings suggested that parents, politicians, employers and employees were increasingly seeking to include fathers as stakeholders by getting them to participate in consultations about work-family reconciliation policy and practice decisions (ibid). Gregory and Milner (2005) contend that at the turn of the twenty-first century, men as fathers became a significant work-family reconciliation policy focus.

Lewis and Campbell (2007) argued that this policy focused on 'involved fatherhood' discourses which de-traditionalised the breadwinner father and emphasised fathers caring and providing responsibilities alongside mothers. Gregory and Milner (2009) notes that, within this policy focus, there was a construction of a contemporary father which was more complex and multidimensional than in previous decades by its consideration of both caring and working practices. Henwood and Proctor (2003) found fathers often experienced challenges reconciling work and family commitments within the context of an increased involvement in childcare. Men as fathers and fathering practices have been conceptualised within wider notions of masculinities (ibid). Doucet (2006) contends that, constructing fathers as carers challenges traditional notions of masculinity.

Connell's (2000) study of men's lives suggests men as fathers have fluid dynamic identities due to culturally situated discourses of masculinity which are often plural and contradictory. Dermott (2008) notes masculinity and fatherhood should not be dissociated or conflated. Social psychologists, Henwood, Finn and Shirani (2008) argue that, it is important to critically analyse taken-for-granted assumptions about men's experiences of fathering. They investigated how men perceive themselves to evaluate the changing sociocultural scripts of fatherhood and masculinity when men became fathers. They found a prevalence of the enduring constructions of disciplinarian and breadwinner in their data from fathers. However, they revealed insights into how fathers showed preference for a 'new' fatherhood construct because it contrasted with these traditional dominant constructs of the father. By studying the discursive practices and meanings of fatherhood, they found the new father construct was discursively constructed as compatible with caring (ibid).

Earlier research by Lupton and Barclay (1997) also found tension in the constructs of traditional breadwinner father and the contemporary new father. Karen Henwood (2012) recently led a qualitative longitudinal study on *Men as Fathers project*, within a wider project called *Timescapes*. As part of this data, Colthart and Henwood (2012) present accounts of self-defined working class and middle class men who give similar descriptions of the tensions between traditional breadwinner father discourses and more contemporary new involved father. I

explore this in detail in my own paper, *The Pick and Mix of Fathering* written for a special issue on care and employment in the international journal, *Fathering* (Yarwood, 2011).

Doucet (2006) has argued that, the historic coupling of care and femininity meant that fathers who were considered stay-at-home fathers were categorised as being less masculine and falling on the periphery of the hegemonic masculine norms of fathering. Doucet's (ibid) work forms part of a burgeoning area of research on stay-at-home dads which suggests that these numbers are increasing. Insurance group Aviva (2010) reported that research carried out by Tickbox.net for Aviva between 15 March 2010 and 22 March 2010 of 1,084 parents with dependent children found that there are ten times more stay-at-home fathers than a decade ago (ibid). Referring to fathers with dependent children under the age of 16, Aviva's calculations are based on data from Office of National Statistics (ONS) Social Trends reports 2000-2009. The findings state that:

Of 3 million economically inactive males in 2000, only 2% (60,000 people) stated they were looking after the home or family. Latest data from ONS shows that there are 10.2 million men with dependent children. Aviva data suggests that 6% of these men (612,000 people) act as primary carer for the home and children. (ibid: 2).

As an early indicator of changes in reported cases of stay-at-home dads, this evidence suggests that this is a fruitful line of enquiry<sup>43</sup>. In part, Doucet's (2006) Canadian focused research presents more detailed theoretical analysis of the contextual factors influencing how mothers and fathers practise caring and working in early twenty-first century Anglo-American societies (ibid). Wall and Arnold's analysis of the representation of the family in the Canadian national newspaper *The Globe* found that 'fathers who take primary responsibility for their children are positioned as exceptional.' (Wall and Arnold, 2007: 514). In more recent British based research, Locke (2013) studied the changing role of fathers by examining media representations of stay-at-home dads. Her preliminary

---

<sup>43</sup> Qualitative discursive research by Willott and Griffin (1997) presents evidence of the links between being economic inactivity and constructions of masculinities. Namely, that unemployment was described by research participants as making men feel less masculine. More recent research is growing on the impact of recession on men as fathers (Fatherhood Institute, 2010).

findings revealed a complex picture with enduring breadwinner discourses prevalent (ibid). She advocates future feminist scholarship aimed at establishing positive discourses in the public domain about the benefits of stay-at-home dads (ibid).

According to Philip and O'Brien (2012), the demands of working and caring on fathers in the early twenty-first century permeates their everyday lives, informing the process of constructing what it means to be a man and a father. Miller (2010) contends that developing an understanding of men as fathers is a complex task. Miller's (ibid) own approach involved the examination of how seventeen men narrated their lives as they entered fatherhood for the first time. Her findings (drawn from a total of fifty seven interviews following a longitudinal research design) revealed the fathers mobilised different constructions of masculinities which incorporated discourses of working and caring in intricate and nuanced ways (ibid).

O'Brien and Shemilt's report on *Working fathers: Earning and caring* (2003) revealed a trend towards greater father involvement in childcare across most western countries. Significantly, the time these fathers spent on directly caring for their children generally decreased as their children got older. This concurs with Hochschild's (1990) earlier work on working couples by suggesting that caring for children in the early years (in her study this was up to the age of 6 years old) was the most demanding due to the largest level of dependence the child has on parents to meet its needs. O'Brien (2005) notes that, in the UK, there has been an increased trend of father involvement in childcare. More specifically, she suggests that, this trend has been most striking for fathers of children under 5 years old, where absolute levels of involvement in child-related activities as a main activity (for example, changing a nappy whilst listening to the radio) increased from a baseline of approximately fifteen minutes a day (in the mid-1970s) to two hours a day by the late 1990s. This gives impetus to my rationale for choosing to interview working parents with children under five because, as I reiterate throughout the thesis (linked to aim three), children under five require significant levels of care, signposted by politicians as a major driver for work-family reconciliation policy (Daly, 2010).

### 3.7 Gender relations, mothers and fathers

As this chapter focuses on *aim two, to critically understand the historical, social and cultural context of gendered working and caring practices and discourses*, I acknowledged the significant progress made historically by first, second and third wave feminists to develop a greater understanding of gender relations between men and women as mothers and fathers, carers and workers (Doucet, 2006; Scott, 1994). Feminism, in theory and practice, in the early twenty-first century continues to locate its analysis within gender relations to argue that both men and women are governed by the norms of gender as a construct (Zalewski, 2000). Notwithstanding recognition that gender norms exist, it is important to note that these norms have historically, socially and culturally worked to men's advantage over women's (marginalised 'Other') (Doucet, 2006). However, there is a growing literature noting that, while masculinity is primarily defined through paid work, men are marginalised too, in terms of the quality of their relationships with their children and their marginalization from the daily activities of family life (O'Brien and Philip, 2012; The Fatherhood institute, 2011). Miller (2012) argues for further research which considers gender relations and develops a greater understanding of the relationships between mothers and fathers. Fathering and mothering are shaped through socially situated discourses (including caring and working discourses) which mobilise normative practices. In this sense, discourses of fathering and mothering are socially constructed and relationally constitutive of each other (Burr, 2003). (I discuss this further in subsequent chapters)

When considering gender, work and family, a key point of interest is the gender relations of mothers and fathers (Philip and O'Brien, 2012). There is a growing corpus of literature on the need to examine gender relations based on research findings suggesting parent's work and childcare arrangements are often constrained along traditional gendered lines despite parents advocating more evenly shared responsibilities between mothers and fathers.

Over three quarters of mothers state that in day-to-day life they have the primary responsibility for childcare in the home. There are significant differences between the perceptions of men and women about whether they share responsibility for childcare equally. Whilst a third of men believe that they share equally, only fourteen per cent of women agree. (Ellison et al, 2009: 11)

Studies exploring gender, family and work vary in their research design and their choice of participants including only fathers (Featherstone, 2009), only mothers (Sevon, 2012; Cahusac and Kanji, 2014) and couples (Fox, 2001; Hochschild, 1990). However, they concur that, gender relations of mothers and fathers are often complex. Embedded in mothering, fathering and parenting practices are a complex set of social relations performed across caring and working domains of women's and men's lives (Miller, 2012). In her book on *Contemporary Fathering*, Featherstone (2009) eloquently acknowledges the significance of examining gender relations when considering mothering and fathering. She points to early feminists' framings of mothering and fathering within exclusive heterosexual married couple relationships, and more recent studies which extend this to recognise the diverse constitution of families within early twenty first century Britain (ibid).

Trinder (2012) notes that, a gender analysis of the relationships between mothers and fathers needs to acknowledge particular gender framings. The masculinised breadwinner father and female carer is one such gendered framing. Substantive evidence maintains the (re)construction of enduring default positions of father as breadwinner and mother as primary carer (Finn and Henwood, 2009; Miller, 2012; Wall and Arnold, 2007). Whilst Doucet (2006) recognises that, although this historic gendering does shift, change and even disappear in particular contexts for mothers and fathers, generally the gendered binary of caring and working is persistent. These framings are, however, over-simplistic against a complex context of change in early twenty-first century Britain. (Particularly changing employment and caring participation of mothers and fathers, including rising stay-at-home fathers and more full-time working mothers).

Within this context, mothers and fathers adopt nuanced arrangements of caring and providing for their children (ibid). In fact, I argue that these social changes are a reminder of the need to continue to extend epistemologies of gender, work and

family in three ways. Firstly, by locating this research within the changing context of working and caring practices for mothers and fathers within early twenty-first century Britain (This is in line with *aim two* of the thesis). Secondly by choosing to interview both mothers and fathers to develop an understanding of the way they talk about working and caring practices within this context (linked explicitly with *aim three*). Thirdly, by adopting a blended discourse analysis approach, I capture the complexity of work-family reconciliation by examining both discourse practices and discourse resources (meeting *aim three*). I discuss each of these in detail in the following methodology chapter linking them back to the aims of the thesis.

### **3.8 Summary**

In this chapter I have presented a historical backdrop of feminist scholarship and feminist activism to develop an understanding of gender, work and family. In doing so, I have reviewed scholarly literature arguing that women have been constructed as 'Other' to men as workers. I have also considered the concept of gender and critiqued the over-simplistic landscape of gender relations portrayed overtime by dominant strands of feminism. Throughout the chapter, I have critically examined the historical, social and cultural context of gendered working and caring practices and discourses (listed as aim two in the introduction of the thesis).

Whilst the contemporary work-family studies I have reviewed in this chapter suggest that, becoming a parent marks a profound life event (Ellison et al, 2009), my historical review of feminist scholarship and activism has highlighted that the arrival of child has traditionally brought more significant challenge to mothers' than fathers' lives. The birth of the child marks long-term systemic gender inequalities between mothers' and fathers', as evidenced throughout history. (Doucet, 2006) According to Ellison et al (2009) despite today's mothers and fathers perceiving more egalitarian caring and working practices, evidence shows that women still undertake disproportionate caring responsibilities and are more likely to be paid less than men. Budig and England (2001) note that, on becoming a mother a women's earning power and occupational status is significantly reduced over a

prolonged period of her life. In contrast, they did not find a similar fatherhood penalty experienced by men (ibid). I discuss this further in the forthcoming chapters.

Key to this chapter has been my consideration of the inextricable connectedness of men and women as they live out gender through interactions with each other as mothers and fathers, workers and carers. By critically reviewing literature I have argued that, within the rubric of gender relations, it is necessary to include men as social agents alongside women when undertaking research into gender, work and family. I now move on to chapter four, methodology, to discuss how I propose to analyse the discourse practices and discourse resources in working parent's interview talk about their caring and working practices. This provides a framework to chapters five, six and seven where I present examples of parent's talk about caring and working practices during my interviews with them.



## **Chapter Four: Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the key theoretical, methodological and ethical considerations central to this study. It details the research design including, the recruitment of participants, ethical considerations, data collection and data analysis. I discuss the processes of decision making pertinent to the study, including the use of semi-structured interviews as a research method and my adoption of discourse analysis to examine the data generated from the interviews. I address the “why?” and “how?” questions intrinsic to this research study with particular reference to the study’s research aims which it is helpful to signpost at this point as follows:

- Critically understand early twenty-first century UK work-family reconciliation policy landscape;
- Critically understand the historical, social and cultural context of gendered working and caring practices and discourses;
- Analyse working parents’ interview talk about their working and caring practices to critically consider what discourse practices and discourse resources they mobilise to position themselves within discourses of caring and working.

I have already made clear that chapter two focused on aim one and chapter three on aim two. In this chapter I turn to aim three. The thesis culminates in a synthesis of all three aims.

### **4.2 Research Beliefs and the Location of the Study**

I concur with Goodley and Smailes (2011) that, at a very fundamental level, no research is value free. Wherever possible, I wish to render my values and

research decisions visible in this chapter. This thesis is framed by intellectual arguments within feminist theory and social constructionist theory which views all knowledge as grounded in human society, situated, partial, local, temporal and historically specific (Coffey, 1999; Haraway 1988). Importantly, my decisions about the study's methodological framework have been influenced by both my personal location and existing research examining similar subject matter of gender, work and family using similar epistemological and ontological standpoints. By locating this study within existing feminist scholarship, I aim to contribute to existing research on the relationship between gender, work and family. I recognise the valuable work feminist scholars have undertaken to develop epistemologies concerned with gender as a social construct and social relations (Lister, 1997; Oakley, 2005; Skeggs, 1997). Within my research framework, I mobilise the concept of gender as a social construct and social relations, embedded within a substantive body of feminist scholarship I reviewed in chapter three.

This study is situated at an intersection of social constructionist theory and feminist theory within the context of early twenty-first century Britain. Willig (2013) notes that, although there is no one feminist epistemology or methodology, feminists agree that established epistemologies of positivist science are based on '[t]he male as the norm' (2013: 6). Positivism has been labelled 'malestream' knowledge (Hearn, 2004: 49). As part of this, challenges have been mounted against essentialist knowledge claims linked to sex differences, the sexual division of labour and the marginalisation of women (Butler, 1990). Both feminist theory and social constructionist theory have multiple disciplinary roots thus the responses to the limitations of positivism are rich and varied. As space precludes a full discussion of this, I wish to focus here on the intersection of both feminist theory and social constructionist theory in their dispute of positivist notions of a universal fixed truth. Instead, they frame knowledge as provisional, constructed and reconstructed historically, socially and culturally (Lazar, 2007)

As I have stated in chapter three, feminist scholarship has noted that industrialisation signified a major shift towards the gendered separation of spheres

of work and care. According to Inglis (2012), during industrialisation<sup>44</sup>, there was a widespread commitment to grand theorising. Grand theorising is defined as knowledge constructed on notions of universalism and fixed truth. Jones, Bradbury and Le Boutillier (2011) argue that, grand theorising is evident in Marx's conflict theory and later, Parson's (1964) consensus theory (structural functionalism). Both of these offered different yet large scale theories on the structure of society with reference to work and family without consideration of the situated, partial and gendered construction of knowledge (Haraway, 1988). In brief, conflict theory stated that society functions by the ruling class exploiting the worker class, maintaining a state of conflict (Inglis, 20102). In contrast, consensus theory considers society functioning through shared interests and values to maintain the equilibrium of social systems such as the family. Whilst their differences were often pitched as conflict versus consensus theory, their similarities lie in their abstract theorisation with limited attention given to individual agency and the ways knowledge is situated, contingent and partial.

C.Wright Mills (2000) adds foundational ethnomethodology alongside consensus theory and conflict theory when commenting critically on these as large scale grand theories. He notes that these intersect in their universalistic knowledge claims (ibid). When asking, how are these theories relevant to this thesis? it is important to signpost that whilst social structures of family and work featured strongly in consensus theory and conflict theory, foundational ethnomethodology is relevant to this thesis as its legacy can be found in aspects of discourse analysis (Inglis, 2012). Thus, when put together, I recognise them as part of the legacy of knowledge on work, family and discourse. Although foundational ethnomethodology differed from conflict and consensus theories by using conversational analysis techniques to theorise agency and social action, C.Wright Mills (2000) unifies conflict theory, consensus theory and ethnomethodology by criticising their universalising of social phenomenon. In contrast, both critical feminist theory and social constructionist theory, share an acknowledgement of the partiality of universalistic knowledge claims found in the three theories mentioned

---

<sup>44</sup> As Inglis (2012) states that this was often labelled modernity, historically constructed as a significant social, economic and political change to modern times.

above. This thesis is situated on the theoretical axis of critical feminist theory and social constructionist theory to acknowledge the ways knowledge is situated and provisional (Haraway, 1988).

Broadly, both feminist theory and social constructionist theory dispute notions of a universal fixed truth 'out there' and instead, consider knowledge as provisional, constructed and reconstructed historically, socially and culturally (Lazar, 2007). Describing the relationship between feminist theory and social constructionist Mary Gergen (2013) states that, feminist theory foregrounds gender and social constructionist theory is congenial to this study of gender. She rightly acknowledges that some feminists do not mobilise the words 'social constructionist theory'. Furthermore she notes that, gender may not be signposted by those using social constructionist theory but instead embedded in a wider framework of understanding about systems of power and the situated and partiality of knowledge (ibid). Burr (2003) notes that social constructionism 'emphasises instead the co-existence of a multiplicity and variety of situation-dependent ways of life' (Burr, 2003: 12). Similarly, feminist theory has sought to recognise intersections of difference within women's lives (Inglis, 2012) '[f]eminist goals are plural and contested and, as such, feminist research cannot be reduced to a particular normative orientation or political, ideological agenda' (Ackerly and True, 2010: 3).

In this thesis I problematize traditional grand theorising which have historically universalised social phenomenon, instead concurring with Jones et al (2011) that, current social phenomenon has inherent complexity requiring a distance from monolithic foundational theories (as discussed with reference to consensus and conflict theories above). Therefore, notions of complexity in social phenomenon framed my discourse focused methodology and analytical frame. For instance, later in this chapter, I discuss my adoption of a blended approach to discourse analysis which attempts to capture the complexity of working parents' interview talk in early twenty-first century Britain. Wetherell (2001a: 5) succinctly critiques grand narratives situated amongst the development of grand theorising by championing the study of discourse to do this.

The study of discourse and the development of new theories of language have been central to sceptical questioning of the 'grand narratives' 'of the Enlightenment'<sup>45</sup>. Postmodernism<sup>46</sup> posits contingency, uncertainty and ambiguity in opposing to modernist notions of truth, progress, certainty through science and the rational control of self and society... To enter the study of discourse is, therefore is to enter into debates about the foundations on which knowledge is built, subjectivity is constructed and society is managed'

For Wetherell (2001a), social constructionism has presented opportunities to critically consider taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world. Burr (2003) subscribes to this viewpoint, suggesting that, discourse and social constructionist theory has the potential to mobilise challenges to oppressive taken-for-granted ways of knowing.

Social constructionist theory and research has been taken up in a variety of ways by those wishing to challenge oppressive and discriminatory practices, for examples in areas of gender and sexuality, disability and race. (Burr, 2003: 20)

For feminists, gender has been central to critiques of social science and the established taken-for-granted assumptions within all knowledge. A main aim of this thesis is to critically examine the historical, social and cultural context of taken-for-granted gendered working and caring practices and discourses. To do this I chose to draw on feminist scholarship because of its substantive attention of the cultural and historical specificity of epistemologies about gendered caring and working practices. Situating this thesis at an intersection of feminist theory and social constructionist theory presents opportunities to critically consider the ways in which knowledge about the world has been constructed, universalised and imposed on others (Burr, 2003).

---

<sup>45</sup> Enlightenment thinking put a strong emphasis on rational thought and universal truth and came to prominence in France, in later eighteenth century (Inglis, 2012)

<sup>46</sup> This refers to my earlier point that postmodernism emerged 'as part of broader epistemological challenges that included non-feminist critical theory, postmodern, post-colonial, post-structural and neo-Marxist perspectives.' (Ackerly and True, 2010: 18) In the context of Wetherell's quote, postmodernism is opposed to modernity. As I have stated above, modernity has been historically constructed as a significant social, economic and political change to modern times with reference to industrialisation (Inglis, 2012). Thus, Wetherell is using postmodernism to refer to a period situated in history where modernist ways of thinking about knowledge changed.

The critical examination of taken-for-granted gendered working and caring practices informs my methodological framework. For example, in chapter two I critically consider the taken-for granted assumptions of caring and working practices embedded in work-family reconciliation policy in twenty first century Britain. Additionally, in chapter three, I analyse the normalisation of white, middle class gendered caring and working practices within Anglo-American societies, tracing their historical, social and cultural context. I believe an approach informed by social constructionism facilitates my identification of versions of caring and working available in Anglo-American societies and enables me to explore their implications for social practices (Willig, 2013).

### **4.3 Reflexivity**

The intellectual movements of feminism and social constructionism have established that, in aiming for and claiming objectivity, positivist male science ignored the influences of intersections of gender, class, dis/ability, age and so on (Haraway, 1988). Feminist Susan Bordo (2003) cautioned against replacing a positivist preoccupation with objectivity and neutrality (a view from nowhere) for an equally problematic fragmented constantly shifting viewpoint (a view from everywhere). While there is no straightforward approach to this problem, Gillies (2006) has advocated that researchers should not be discouraged but instead aim to interpret and theorise experiences of living with gender and other identity intersections using the concept of reflexivity mobilised in qualitative research.

Reflexivity, broadly defined, means reflecting on and understanding our own personal, political and intellectual biographies as researchers and making explicit our location in relation to our research respondents. It also means acknowledging the critical roles we play in creating, interpreting, and theorizing research data. (Doucet, 2007: 47)

The links between public knowledge and private life form part of long standing discussions about the centrality of reflexivity within feminist methodologies and epistemologies. Willig (2013) states that, reflexivity within qualitative methodologies acknowledges that the researcher contributes to the construction of meaning throughout the research process. In qualitative research, the personal biography of both the researcher and research participants can encapsulate a

multiplicity of intersections of gender, class, race, age, sexuality and dis/ability (Fine, 1984). Whilst researchers mobilising feminist theory and social constructionist theory acknowledge this, there are differences in the extent to which reflexivity is emphasised in research studies (Howitt, 2010; Yarwood, 2013). In the case of this thesis, I believe my own personal biography played a significant part of the research process. Studying feminist scholarship confirmed my sense of the personal is political (Letherby, 2003). For instance, during the research process, as I negotiated and renegotiated the challenges of everyday life within the complexity of my personal biography, I strived to recognise their influences on my practice as a researcher, academic and developing feminist scholar. As I make clear in chapter three, I concur with Letherby (2003) that;

...any piece of research refers to what has gone on before by adding in levels of complexity or challenging previous perspectives. What research should provide is modification, reworkings, extensions and/or critiques of existing and the creation of new concepts. (2003: 67).

Mobilising the concept of reflexivity is one of the ways I add to existing scholarship as it enables me to document how I believe the research adds to existing scholarship without the exact duplication of it because of what I bring to the research (as a researcher with my own subjectivities). I thread examples of this throughout this thesis. For instance, in chapter one I discuss my childhood experiences of having working parents and how this motivated me to undertake this study. Also in chapter eight I document my reflexive considerations of how I positioned myself, how my participants positioned me and how we (the researcher and researched) are positioned in the context of wider social structures of working and caring.

I believe reflexivity is important to this thesis as it enables me to document that during the research journey my identity changed from non-mother to mother (on maternity leave) to full-time working mother thus providing a unique personal experience. (For detailed discussion of this identity shift read, Yarwood, 2013). This identity change, I argue, was significant and reflexivity provided a tool within the methodological framework to explain 'how' and 'why' this was significant. Furthermore, an awareness of how language was used in the interviews was part

of this reflexive process and I now turn to discuss critical language awareness with reference to studying gender and discourse.

#### **4.4 Studying Gender and Discourse**

According to Willig (2013) critical language awareness forms part of reflexivity embedded in epistemologies commonly associated with 'the discursive turn'. '[t]he words we use to describe our experiences play a part in the construction the meanings that we attribute to such experiences.' (Willig, 2013: 10). Lazar (2007) describes the 'discursive turn' as spotlighting issues of language and discourse. In mobilising the concept of discourse, I am defining it as, a socially situated frame of reference, a way of interpreting the world and giving it meaning through language. Discourses are:

[h]istorically variable ways of specifying knowledges and truths, whereby knowledges are socially constructed and produced by effects of power and spoken in terms of truths (Carabine, 2001: 274).

The methodological framework of this thesis has been influenced by a principal assumption embedded within social constructionist theory that language is a constructive force of social action <sup>47</sup>(Burr, 2003). As Willig (2013) notes

Since language plays an important part of the social construction of what we regard as knowledge, qualitative researchers who adopt a social constructionist orientation to knowledge tend to study discourses. (2013:17)

Whilst it would be erroneous to assume a prerequisite set of research methods for social constructionist approaches to research meanings of gender and discourse, often qualitative tools are adopted as a fitting choice opposed to quantitative tools (Burr, 2003). Qualitative researchers vary in their viewpoints on the extent to which language constructs reality and as such, there are multiple research approaches (Gee, 2005). In fact, Gee (2005) frames this positively, arguing that no one approach to studying discourse is uniquely 'right' because different

---

<sup>47</sup> As part of the reflexive process I argue that the interviews were co-constructions thus I believe a critical language awareness encompasses discussion of my own language use (as the interviewer) within the interview. I discuss this in more detail within the data analysis chapters (five, six and seven) and revisit it in chapter eight as part of a discussion of reflexivity within my concluding discussions.



approaches fit different research. This sentiment echoes feminist researchers Maynard et al (1994) who, a decade earlier, had sought to challenge the masculinist orthodoxy of formulaic approaches to doing research more generally. Gergen and Gergen (2008: 60) note that, social constructionism can:

...open the door to multiple traditions, each with their own particular view of knowledge and methodology...we are challenged to be creative, to initiate new ways of producing knowledge that is tied to our particular values and ideals.

Positioned at the intersection of social constructionist theory and feminist theory is the work of Deborah Cameron (1992: 16) who questioned 'the whole scholarly objective bias of linguistics to show how assumptions and practices of linguistics are implicated in patriarchal ideology and oppression'. In doing so, she resonated many of the challenges found throughout feminist scholarship (discussed in chapter three) of malestream bias. Cameron (1992) adopted the analytic tools of both conversation analysis and discourse analysis to reject the reductionist taken-for-granted assumptions that gender exists in individuals. More generally, studies of gender and discourse have framed gender as socially situated in discourse, language and action (Baxter and Wallace, 2009; Lazar 2007; Benwell and Stokoe, 2006).

Smithson and Stokoe (2005) note that, positivism had provided essentialist treatment of sex and gender as fixed 'traits' by opposing men and women as discrete homogenous categories. In particular, traditional examinations of gender differences and talk perpetuated notions of women as other to man using three main theoretical frameworks of deficit; dominance and difference (Tannen, 2001, Benwell and Stokoe, 2006, Willig, 2013). Instead a broadly feminist theorization of gender and discourse argued that people *do* gender as routine accomplishments in talk. This transformed thinking on traditional notions of women as other to men (Butler, 1990; West and Fenstermaker, 1995; West and Zimmerman, 1987). As Lazar (2007: 144) notes, a burgeoning body of feminist discourse literature developed a focus on social justice and transformation:

[p]oststructuralist theorization offers a critically useful view of discourse as a site of struggle, where forces of social (re)production and contestation are played out.

Despite the general agreement of the male supremacy criticisms of positivism (Haraway, 1988) and resultant research approaches to gender and language, the response from critics of positivist tradition ranged in their approaches to doing discourse analysis. A substantial literature has developed on these different discourse analysis approaches. According to Howitt (2010) these differences stem from different intellectual roots. Broadly, within psychology, in the past thirty years scholars have mainly debated two prominent versions of doing discourse analysis. Put simply, these two versions have been characterised as concentrating on either micro-level of analysis linked to linguistic philosophy<sup>48</sup> or macro-level analysis which concentrates on societal issues and social institutions<sup>49</sup> (Burr 2003; Howitt, 2010; Willig, 2013). Although I explore these differences in more detail below I argue that this context of multiple intellectual roots and approaches to discourse analysis helps frame the study of gender and discourse.

To summarise, whilst there is agreement that the concept of gender is 'deeply problematic' (Lazar, 2007:141) both as a construct and in speaking about men and women in universal, totalizing gender relations terms, discourse analysts approach these problems in different ways. Returning to my critical discussion of the need to recognise knowledge as situated, complex and provisional (Haraway, 1988), current social phenomenon (focusing on caring and working in this thesis) is complex, requiring a movement away from monolithic theories incorporating universalism. As such, within the field of discourse analysis, researchers have noted that methodological approaches to current social phenomenon can be diverse (Potter, 2012). Before I turn to outline discourse analysis and my own choice of discourse analysis procedure, I wish to establish my data collection method, recruitment of participants and the ethical considerations of the study.

---

<sup>48</sup> This is often referred to as Discursive psychology which is traced to the publication of Potter and Wetherell's (1987) *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour*. Discursive psychology has evolved in many ways including Wetherell's (2001a) more recent movement towards a more blended approach to discourse analysis and Potter's (2012) movement towards a greater advocacy of naturally occurring talk rather interviews as data sources.

<sup>49</sup> Such as the labour market including employment and unemployment and systems of power linked to gender and class.

## 4.5 Qualitative Interviews

Interviews are a widely used method of data collection in qualitative research (Josselson, 2013). The parameters of qualitative interviews are often blurred as researchers dispute differences between structured interviews, semi-structured interviews and open interviews (Mason, 2009). For the purpose of this study I would locate my own interview interpretation as broadly semi-structured interviews noted, by Willig (2013), as compatible with discourse analysis<sup>50</sup>. I define an interview as a social activity thus I place value on its specificity as a site of interaction (Fontana and Frey, 2008). As Fontana and Frey (ibid) state, qualitative interviews provide opportunities for the emergence of rich qualitative data open to equally rich interpretation through analysis. I believe data emerging from interviews is situational, contextual and interactional. Meanings are created and recreated in the interview through interactional exchange of dialogue and co-construction involving me (the researcher) and the interview participants (Mason, 2009).

*Aim three* of this study is to *analyse working parents' interview talk about their working and caring practices to critically consider what discourse practices and discourse resources they mobilise to position themselves within discourses of caring and working*. To do this I recruited participants and conducted interviews with nine mothers and five fathers analysing the resulting transcripts drawing on resources from discourse analysis, feminist and social constructionist theory.

### 4.5.1 Interview Participants and Recruitment

Below I introduce the individual participants by detailing a profile of each. Firstly I provide a summary of relevant information about recruitment of the participants.

All fourteen participants were in paid employment in the UK at the time of recruitment (data collection period was 2009-2011). Their occupations covered

---

<sup>50</sup> Notwithstanding the lively debates within my chosen method of discourse analysis about the merits of naturally occurring talk in comparison to interviews, for the purpose of this study I chose interviews. I transcribed each interview framed as a text to analyse discursively (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006).

both manual and non-manual work and varied in type and contractual arrangements including part-time, full-time, flexi-time, shift work, compressed hours and temporary contracts (Edgell, 2012). I used the normative definition of work as paid employment within the labour market, drawing on much of the existing work-family literature and research covering labour force participation (Office for National Statistics, 2010). Whilst I could have included parents in 'non-normative' work such as unpaid volunteering I deemed this was beyond the scope of this thesis.

The participants varied in cohabiting arrangements, marital status and ethnicity. All identified themselves as aged between 28 and 43 years old and talked about their biological children from an existing or past heterosexual relationship. I chose to include mothers and fathers in paid work with children aged five years and under because most contemporary changes to UK work-family policy and practice (in the early twenty-first century) centred on families with children under five years old, namely extensions to parental leave entitlements (maternity / paternity leave, parental and carers) and flexible working (as discussed in chapter two). Furthermore, following on from earlier chapters, it has been argued that the years from birth to five require significantly higher levels of intensive caring for most families<sup>51</sup> (Craig and Sawrikar, 2009; Hochschild, 1990) thus provided the most data rich site for this research. Additionally, in the reviewed literature, the call for more research with fathers as participants alongside mothers resonated with my commitment to interviewing both mothers and fathers in this study. (In chapter eight, I discuss this further.) Also, my own identity change from non-mother to working mother presented me with opportunities to capture first-hand the experience providing intensive caring for my own baby.

During the recruitment period (2009-2011), my participants were given the opportunity to learn about the study through initial advertising using posters, websites and electronic communication tools such as emails and notice boards of fourteen local libraries within one Metropolitan council borough of a particular city

---

<sup>51</sup> Although I recognise that intensive levels of caring can also be significant for families caring for older relatives and/or (dis)abled family members. This is sometimes included in what is described as the sandwich of care when people may be caring for relatives across generations.

within North England<sup>52</sup>. These libraries were chosen as sites to advertise my research for potential participants as they held baby massage clubs, parent and toddler groups, and day nursery rhythm and rhyme sessions. The initial advertising on posters, websites and electronic communication tools requested volunteers to make contact with me in the first instance to discuss potential participation, ethical considerations and research procedures.

Unlike the Millennium Cohort Study (Hansen et al., 2010), I used a purposive sampling technique (Mason, 2009) and do not claim that those recruited in my study are representative. The sampling technique enabled me to ask those parents who volunteered in the first instance to act as gatekeepers, providing contact points to other potential participants. This enabled my sample group to expand through parents recommending others who fitted my sample criteria of being a working parent with a child under five years old.

This approach focused on recruiting a sample of working parents with children under five (within the data collection period 2009-2011). The rationale for this sample choice was that during this period there had been significant changes to the UK policy and practice context. It was felt that by choosing volunteers who had children aged five years and under, the research could study the talk of working parents who were often identified as social policy agents within work-family reconciliation policy context (as discussed in chapter two). In particular, I felt that I could analyse the working parents' interview talk against a backdrop of the wider discourses of caring and working embedded within the UK work-family reconciliation policy agenda. In other words, I approached the interview talk having undertaken critical examination of the historical, social and cultural context of gendered working and caring practices and discourses thus, this shaped my thesis. Namely, my adoption of a blended discourse analysis approach started with examining these caring and working discourses within policy. (I discuss this in more detail later to situate within debates about macro and micro discourse analysis.)

---

<sup>52</sup> According to the ONS (2011) Neighbour census statistics, the Borough covers 41 square miles, with an estimated population of 230,000 people, encompassing both rural and urban geographies. Within the Borough over 29,000 families have dependent children in the household, 11,500 of which are children aged 0-4 years age.

Importantly, as this contemporary policy landscape did not differentiate between parent and child's residency arrangements<sup>53</sup> I decided that co-residency was not a requirement of the sample (although only one of the total fourteen participants recruited did not live permanently with their child.). All the parents interviewed were biologically related to the children in their accounts. Each parent was interviewed separately using qualitative interviews. I gained signed ethical consent from each participant and the interviews took place in a negotiated location that both the participant and I felt comfortable with (Daly, 2007). I discuss ethical considerations in more detail later in this chapter.

#### **4.5.2 Introducing the participants<sup>54 55</sup>**

##### **Michala**

Michala was a 30 year old white British woman. Michala worked full-time as a care professional. She said, after leaving school, she had worked hard to gain qualifications up to degree level. She was cohabiting with her partner, Jake (see below). They lived within a 5 mile radius of both her parents and Jake's extended family. Her two year old daughter, Libby, attended playgroup in the mornings. In the afternoons, both Jake and her grandparents cared for Libby until Michala came home from work.

Michala chose to be interviewed at home on a week night after work when Libby was in bed. The interview lasted an hour. Jake went to the shop for milk as we started the interview. He returned an hour later for his own interview.

---

<sup>53</sup> In fact since the Child Support Act (1991) there has been a conscious effort by policy makers to involve parents particularly if they are non-resident with their children due to the economic benefits. Further discussion extends beyond the study's remit.

<sup>54</sup> A total of 14 participants. Five fathers and nine mothers.

<sup>55</sup> I had already undertaken interviews with five participants before I was pregnant. During pregnancy I undertook interviews with a further six participants and three after pregnancy.

## **Jake**

Jake was a 33 year old white British man. Jake worked part-time in public services. Jake said he didn't like school and never attended college. He was cohabiting with his partner, Michala. They lived within a 5 mile radius of Jake's extended family and Michala's parents. Their two year old daughter, Libby, attended playgroup in the mornings. Jake said, he and Michala's parents 'took it in turns' to care for Libby in the afternoons until Michala came home from work.

Jake chose to be interviewed at home on a week night when Libby was in bed. The interview lasted an hour. Jake asked to be interviewed after Michala. Michala was not present during Jake's interview.

## **Rick**

Rick was a 29 year old single (separated from wife), white British man. He worked in retail full-time. He described his job as sales focused with some travelling, by company car, around the North of England to sell specialist goods to professionals. He was educated to college level, saying he liked to learn 'on the job'. He had an 18 month old daughter, Anya, who lived two miles away with her mother (they separated when Anya was 6 months). Rick lived fifty miles from his parents (Anya's grandparents) but he would spend weekends with Anya, often driving with her to his parent's house fifty miles away.

My interview with Rick took place in a coffee shop. We negotiated this location based on proximity between both our workplaces and Rick's home. Rick often referred to his ex-partner in the interview. After the interview (approximately after one hour and the recording had stopped) he thanked me, saying that it was the first time he talked to anyone about his work, family and marital separation since his separation had happened a year ago.

## **Chloe**

Chloe was a 28 year old single black British woman. She described herself as a single parent. She worked part-time in care services whilst studying for a degree. She had twin sons, Callum and Leo, both four years old. She described their care as divided between herself, her family and nursery. She said their father had 'no involvement in their care and limited contact despite living around the corner'.

Chloe chose to be interviewed in my office at work. The interview lasted fifty minutes.

## **Sarah**

Sarah was a 40 year old white British women married to Neil (see below). Sarah had recently left a professional management position to undertake professional degree level training in an alternative field. During this period of retraining, she worked part-time in administration. Her daughter, Jade, was three years old and attended playgroup whilst Sarah studied or worked part-time.

Sarah chose to be interviewed at home (on a week night) after work when Neil was bathing Jade upstairs. The interview lasted an hour.

## **Neil**

Neil was a 43 year old full-time working professional with management responsibilities. He described himself as 'mixed race, dual heritage and being an older dad'. His daughter, Jade, was three years old and attended playgroup whilst Sarah studied or worked part-time. He described undergoing recent medical intervention following 'an organ malfunction but I'm fit again now'.

Neil chose to be interviewed directly after Sarah (his wife). During the interview Sarah was present, either by sitting beside Neil or tidying the house within earshot. The interview lasted an hour and during this time Sarah contributed by 'chipping in' during points of the interview when she sat next to Neil.



## **Debbie**

Debbie was a 34 year old, white British women working part-time in professional legal services. She had two children, a three year old son, Alex and an eighteen month old daughter, Paige. She said she had enjoyed studying for her university degree before her children were born. She was married to Stan who worked shifts (see below). She lived within 5 miles of her own extended family. Her children attended nursery when Debbie was at work.

Debbie chose to be interviewed at home when the house was 'empty' as her husband and children were out. The interview lasted an hour and a half and Debbie said she enjoyed it.

## **Stan**

Stan was a 36 year old, white British man, working full-time shift work in public services. He was married to Debbie (above). They had two children, a three year old son, Alex and an eighteen month old daughter, Paige. Both children went to nursery when Debbie was working. Stan said he had studied up to degree level.

Stan chose to be interviewed in the sitting room of his home whilst Debbie and his children were in the garden. The interview lasted twenty five minutes as he said he was tired.

## **Leila**

Leila was a 32 year old, white British, married woman. She had a three year old son, Ian, and an eighteen month old son, Scott. She said her sons had 'hated nursery so I took them out and do it myself'. She was a part time working care professional who, at the time of the interview, was having difficulty finding a similar new job that was only two days a week.

Leila chose to be interviewed in a coffee shop without her children. We negotiated this location based on proximity between both our workplaces. The interview lasted an hour and ten minutes.

## **Gloria**

Gloria was a 33 year old, white British part-time service sector professional. She had a two year old, Joe, who attended private day nursery. She was married and lived two hundred miles from both her family and her partners.

Gloria chose to be interviewed in a coffee shop on a Sunday whilst her son had a nap in his pram. We negotiated this location based on proximity to her home. The interview lasted forty minutes.

## **Brad**

Brad was a 32 year old white British man. He worked as a full-time scientist which meant some travelling around the country and also some working from home. He had a nine month old daughter, Kate and a wife, Saira. He said 'Kate had bad colic since birth and Saira has been pretty depressed'. He said they had no family living near to help and he did not know when his wife, Saira would go back to work. Brad was retraining to become a teacher via distance learning.

Brad chose to be interviewed in a coffee shop on a Sunday whilst his daughter sat in her pram. We negotiated this location based on proximity to his home. The interview lasted an hour although some of this involved baby play as Kate wanted to sit on her daddy's knee.

## **Allana**

Allana was a 30 year old professional white British woman. She worked part-time in the service sector. She had a two year old daughter, Ellie who attended nursery. The nursery was close to both Allana's and her husband's workplace. Allana said they lived 'over one hundred miles from any family'.

Allana chose to be interviewed in the dining area of her workplace. The interview lasted one hour.

## **Tiffany**

Tiffany was a 40 year old white British woman. She described school as 'horrible' and undertook vocational work-based training after school. She worked part-time in the service sector. She was married and had a daughter, Phoenix aged one year old.

Tiffany chose to be interviewed in a coffee shop on a Sunday whilst her daughter had a nap in her pram. We negotiated this location based on proximity to her home. The interview lasted forty five minutes.

## **Ivy**

Ivy was a 36 year old white British woman. She worked full-time in professional communication services. She had a one year old son, Rylan and was cohabiting with her partner, Tom. Her son went to a private day nursery full-time. She said she lived in a different country to both her and her partner's family.

Ivy chose to be interviewed at home when her husband and son were out. The interview lasted forty five minutes as she said she was meant to be working from home and needed to send emails to her manager.

### **4.5.3 Interview Schedule**

Several resources were used to inform the development of the interview schedule. I discussed the project with working parents who I knew from within my existing personal and public networks including, work colleagues, relatives and friends. This aided in building my ideas about the kinds of considerations that might be significant in approaching the interviews. I also wrote reflexive notes about my own experiences of being interviewed (at that time I was not a parent) and also interviewing others as part of my personal life and professional training. Furthermore, feminist scholarship on undertaking qualitative interviews (particularly with mothers and fathers) provided the theoretical frame that informed the development of the schedule (Miller, 2005, 2010; Gillies, 2006; Oakley, 2005).

The interview schedule was developed as an 'agenda' that I piloted with Shaz, a work colleague who had volunteered because she was pregnant with a child but had a step-daughter from a previous relationship. Whilst I aimed to interview only working parents with children under five, I felt undertaking a pilot interview with Shaz was beneficial in inviting her to comment on the proposed questions, and consider other issues that interviewees might want to discuss. This was informed by my adoption of a reflexive research approach. After the pilot interview, in my reflexive notes I documented that I felt more confident in undertaking the prospective interviews as I had lived through the interview experience with Shaz. In other words I felt I had worked on developing a systematic and rigorous procedure and schedule prior to commencing further interviews (Mason, 2009). Notwithstanding, my acceptance that all interviews can be nuanced and complex, my pilot provided me with the opportunities to develop a readiness for the anticipated and unanticipated challenges often posed during interviews. As Mason (2009: 69) points out:

A qualitative interviewer has to be ready to make on the spot decisions about the context and sequence of the interview as it progresses, and to keep everything running smoothly.

In both the pilot and other interviews I found that I was intellectually multitasking which I identified in my reflexive notes as follows:

*I was listening and trying to interpret meaning, thinking about my response to what was being said, trying to interpret changes in their demeanour such as losing interest or feeling distracted by a crying child. I was also reflecting on earlier parts of the interview, formulating a response to what they were saying or what is happening, formulating the next question, monitoring the time, checking the Dictaphone, judging the breadth and depth of the interview discussion, monitoring the background noise. Additionally, in the interviews in which I was pregnant, I was trying to maintain my own physical comfort (Yarwood, 2013).*

Overall the interviews were demanding yet rewarding opportunities to engage in dialogue with my participants (Oakley, 2005). However I would not idealise the interview experience, despite my list of multitasking above, some interviews posed more challenges than others (a point that is best placed to be explored in detail in the forthcoming ethical considerations section of this chapter.)

In terms of devising an interview schedule from a discourse analytic point of view, Willig (2013) provides the following guidance:

Demographic information should only be *where relevant*. For example, if the study is concerned with the ways in which men talk about women and work, it may well be helpful to know whether participants themselves are employed or unemployed, and whether or not they have female partners. However provision for standard demographic information (e.g. age gender, social class, ethnicity, education) *is not appropriate*. This is because, from a discourse analytical point of view, provision of such 'information' is in fact a way of constructing identities. Providing such 'information' out of context and without rationale suggests that particular social categories capture the essence of people placed within them. (Willig, 2013: 121)

Whilst I drew on Willig's (2013) guidance for devising an interview schedule to fit with the discursive interest of this study, my pilot interview with Shaz enabled me to develop an open and flexible approach to the interview schedule that fit with the particularities of this study. Namely, I asked a variety of loosely structured questions, for example, what does it mean to you to be a mother / father? Could you tell me about your weekly childcare and working arrangements? (For more details see appendix two). The schedule also permitted the participants to raise and focus on the issues that were of central importance to them. Interestingly many participants would talk about themselves and their identities drawing on social categories such as class and age. Furthermore I deemed it relevant to incorporate questions which enabled them to describe their personal biography so that they had opportunity to talk about general demographic information which they deemed relevant.

The pilot interview enabled me to develop an interview schedule which gave participants the opportunity to self-ascribe social categories if they chose to. This became a fertile area of the schedule as participants self-ascribed identities such old father or young mother. I argue that this open and flexible approach facilitated reflexivity in the research process (Mason, 2009) as I gave the participant opportunities to ask me about myself and had spent time as part of the pilot process considering my own personal biography. This was significant in encompassing my own identity change during the process, namely, at the beginning of data collection I was not a parent but during the process my status changed, allowing different insight and access into the world of parenting. I made

my status known to the participants, allowing my own experiences to be shared in the process (Burr, 2003). Throughout, I explored how my changing personal identity informed the research process as I have documented in Yarwood (2013).

## **4.6 Ethical Considerations**

Ethics concerns the morality of human conduct (Hammersley, 2013). In relation to social research, ethical considerations refer to the researcher's moral deliberation, choice and accountability throughout the research process (Mauthner, Birch, Jessop and Miller, 2008). Researching social phenomenon through interviews inevitably raises ethical considerations. According to Hammersley (2013), researchers have a duty and responsibility to ensure that decision-making throughout the research process is in line with ethical guidelines. This doctoral study was funded by Manchester Metropolitan University where I am employed as a Senior Lecturer. Before the commencement of my study I presented my research proposal to be scrutinised by the Manchester Metropolitan University Department of Psychology and Social Change's Ethics Panel. The ethical considerations of the study incorporated my obligations to the university's reputation and the participants within the study. The ethical standard guidelines I followed were provided by British Psychological Society (2009) and the Social Research Association (2003). In this section I make explicit reference to the key considerations of potential for deception, informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality. Importantly these key considerations have been enmeshed throughout the research process therefore are also embedded in my discussions in subsequent chapters.

Gaining informed consent involved ensuring that participants understood the research process, and were participating willingly in the process. To do this I took care to explain my position as researcher, my own interests and investments in the research during initial contact. As part of this I gave as clear an explanation of the purpose and process of the research as I could, providing participants with information sheets to read and digest at a time convenient for them. I decided it was important that they could do this without my presence as I did not want them

to feel unduly pressured to participate simply because they were reading the informed consent form and information sheet in my presence. They were also invited to comment on, add to, and otherwise amend proposed questions and topics of discussion, and to treat it as an 'agenda' rather than a fixed list of scheduled interview questions.

Approximately one week after sending out the information I contacted the participant to ask if they were willing to participate, allowing participants the space to consider their participation in the research process. Having secured their agreement to participate, we arranged a mutually convenient time and venue to undertake the interview. Once we met, I informed them when I was switching the Dictaphone tape recorder on. I placed the Dictaphone in a position visible to the participant and made it clear they could ask me to turn it off at any time if they wished to stop the recording. Also I made it clear that they could have a copy of the recording if they wished and could also withdraw from the research at any time. Their right to withdraw from the study was made both verbally and in writing. In addition, I emphasised that no participant was required to answer any particular question, and that if they did not wish to participate in particular sections of the research they did not have to. In line with ethical guidelines, I adopted this strategy as standard practice across all the interviews, following the pilot interview with Shaz and discussions with my supervisors.

Stephanie Taylor (2001) notes that, obtaining informed consent does not absolve the researcher from other ethical obligations including, confidentiality and anonymity. Whilst often considered together, confidentiality ensures the individual gives permission to disclose any information obtained in the research (Mauthner et al, 2008). Anonymity means the identity of research participants should not be disclosed via both reported and direct quotations. I deployed a range of strategies to ensure that all information concerning the participants was kept confidential and anonymised throughout the study.

In terms of anonymity and confidentiality, the information sheet outlined my obligations to their anonymity and confidentiality. All audio recordings were kept securely locked in a filing cabinet in my office at Manchester Metropolitan University. An electronic version would be saved, stored and password protected

on my computer. Transcripts were only shared with members of my supervisory team once they had been suitably anonymised (including names of participants, their employers and other personal and place names were removed from the transcripts).

In terms of anonymity, I informed all participants that I would replace their real name with a pseudonym. When doing so, I made clear that names can carry significance in terms of culture, familial ties, ethnicity and gender. Thus, I gave participants the opportunity to choose a pseudonym where they saw fit. The extent and limits of confidentiality and anonymity were explored before the tape recorder was switched on because I felt that although this had been outlined in the information sheet it gave them the opportunity to discuss any concerns in person with me.

Mason (2009) notes that, when confronted with the immediacy of the interview, before the interview commences, the participant may raise questions about ethical considerations. Thus I felt opening up dialogue between the participant and myself before commencing the recorded interview, presented opportunities to discuss and clarify any ethical concerns. One participant asked, *'How can it be anonymous when I've just signed my real name on the consent form?'* I reassured the participant that the consent forms would not appear in the appendix or any other part of the thesis. Furthermore I also assured them that all names and personal information would be anonymised in other public presentations or publications. However, I did discuss with participants the possibility that my employment location and other details in the thesis could provide key indicators to the geographic location of the research. Taylor (2001) notes that, particular problems can arise when participants are drawn from a small community making them readily identifiable. As the research participants were spread across a wide geographic base of highly populated urban areas when I discussed this with them their feedback did not raise any concerns.

Questions of ethics are salient to the consequences, dissemination and publishing of research (Coffey, 1999). In this thesis I have adhered to the standard institutional and disciplinary guidelines which posit the researcher's obligations to



respect participant's privacy of respondent and recognise any potential risk, harm or deception. According to Mauthner et al (2008):

The complexities of researching private lives and placing accounts in the public arena raise multiple ethical issues for the researcher that cannot be solved solely by the application of abstract rules, principles and guidelines. (2008: 1).

As I have discussed earlier in the chapter, I adopted a reflexive approach to the research process (Mason, 2009) by giving participants opportunities to ask me questions about myself. This was significant in raising ethical considerations which did not fit neatly within the remit of the ethical guidelines, namely whether or not to disclose private personal biographic information at the risk of deceiving participants.

As my identity changed during the research process, from non-mother to pregnant woman to full-time working mother, so did the questions the participants asked me. Whilst not wishing to be deceptive, I aimed to answer the participants' questions honestly. However, some of the questions about my private life and my pregnant body made me feel uncomfortable. In particular, I believe, if I had a choice, I would have sometimes chosen not to make my pregnancy visible as I felt my physicality was scrutinised. I found my pregnant appearance in the interviews provided a visible cue to which parents asked questions about. I felt encouraged by this, believing this to be a sign of their engagement and interest in the interview. Simultaneously I also found their questions challenging. In particular, sometimes I didn't want to talk about my pregnancy. For instance, Leila's comment, *You are quite big*, made me feel self-conscious, having not been used to people making explicit comments about my physical appearance before being pregnant. Twigg (2006) suggests that many researchers feel uneasy with the messy empirical realities of the fleshy material body. For Gatrell (2005) the physical embodiment of pregnancy can signify societal assumptions that there are differential notions of acceptability when discussing physicality that in other circumstances would not be considered normative practices of talk. Gatrell (2007) suggests that employed pregnant women often feel they are problematized due to their perceived leaky bodies and as such positioned outside the normalised worker discourse. Unlike the interviews prior to my pregnancy, there was no explicit reference to me as a

researcher. Thus, it is my belief that, becoming pregnant and the embodied visibility of this, provided participants with a reference point during their discussions about their own parenting identities. I believe my pregnant body was tangible in its physical state (Johnson, Burrows and Williamson, 2004) thus presented an embodied reference point to my identity.

As I have discussed elsewhere in more detail (Yarwood, 2013) the relationship between the researched and the researcher can be oversimplified in ethical guidelines. Whilst my identity change facilitated different insights and access into the world of parenting, I felt these also influenced my ethical considerations of privacy and potential for deception. In disclosing personal biographic information to the participants, I felt I was attending to ethical praxis of allowing my own experiences to be shared in the process (Burr, 2003). Mauthner et al (2008) note that, ethical concerns are perplexing requiring contextualised methods of reasoning.

#### **4.7 The Study's Discursive Framework**

Howitt (2010) notes that, understanding discourse analysis involves understanding its epistemological standpoints and intellectual roots alongside studying how other researchers have done discourse analysis.

The would-be discourse analyst should learn as much as possible about its theoretical ideas before much can be gained from learning the seemingly more practical aspects of doing discourse analysis – otherwise it is a bit like writing poetry never having seen a poem. Reading discourse analytic work in books and journal articles is the main route to mastery<sup>56</sup> of the theory. (Howitt, 2010: 220)

Discourse analysis was not something I had studied in my BA (Hons) Sociology degree or my M.Ed degree. Interestingly Potter (2004: 607) summarised the landscape in the following way,

---

<sup>56</sup> The use of the word 'mastery' is quoted directly from Howitt (2010: 220). I wish to signpost my recognition of this as a gendered term.

...in mid 80s it was possible to find different books called *Discourse Analysis* with almost no overlap in subject matter; the situation at the start of the 00s is, if anything, even more fragmented.

During the early stages of this doctoral study, I saturated myself in reading and learning about different approaches to discourse analysis. I learnt that some scholars are influenced by traditions of conversational analysis to examine the fine-grained aspects of individual agency and linguistic nuances to uncover the normative practice through which interaction is managed in situ (Willig, 2008). I also learnt of other approaches such as Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2001; Van Dijk, 2001) and Foucauldian discourse analysis (Hall, 2001) are concerned with the wider social processes, workings of power and how language is organised in social life and social institutions to legitimise particular knowledge and understanding as taken-for-granted. Whilst Speer (2007) suggests that there is a strong division between particular versions of discourse research, Potter and Wetherell (1995: 81 cited in Willig, 2013: 117) believe that the distinction 'should not be painted too sharply'. Wetherell et al (2001a) advocates a synthesis of the versions and it is this approach I adopt here as enables me to validate a range of approaches to discourse analysis. Sims-Shouten, Riley and Willig (2007) argue that any, '....ideological dogmatism shuts down thinking, either because people are afraid of the consequences of thinking differently from the dominant group or because they simply stop thinking differently.' (Sims-Schouten et al, 2007;143).

Wetherell's (2001) blended version sits with the feminist theory informing this research in that it acknowledges the need to challenge dominant mainstream research methods hierarchically located, legitimising only certain 'kinds' of data, information and sources (Stanley and Wise, 1993; Haraway, 1988). Furthermore a blended approach moves away from what Willig (2012; 2013) and Burr (2003) identify as notions of what is worthy of note, what should be presented/sourced as universal and the patriarchal values associated with mainstream positivist epistemologies. This fits with my theoretical framework, which recognises complexity in social phenomenon rather than totalizing universalism attributed to traditional grand theories, mainstream epistemologies and methodologies.

Burr (2003) states that, a blended version of discourse analysis reconceptualises the false dichotomy between the individual agent and social structures by recognising their interdependence. Van Dijk (2008) advocates researchers identify a clear rationale for carrying out a particular approach to discourse analysis. With this in mind, my own rationale for adopting Wetherell et al's (2001a) blended version of discourse analysis is that the approach facilitates the aims of this research thesis. Furthermore I argue it fits with the notion of complexity in social phenomenon I discussed earlier. Namely, to analyse working parents' interview talk critically, a blended approach assists my consideration of the discursive practices the interviewees mobilise to position themselves within wider discourses of caring and working. This brings together the two key concepts of discourse resources and discourse practices.

Discourse resources are defined as objects, subjects and versions of social reality available to people (Willig, 2013). Discourse practices are defined as what people do in talk, how they use discourse resources and how they orientate to discourse resources (ibid). These concepts of discourse resources and discourse practices facilitate the thesis aims which were significant in shaping my approach to discourse analysis. Namely to critically explore work-family reconciliation in early twenty-first century Britain by examining both discourse practices within working parents' interview talk about their caring and working practices and also wider discourses of caring and working, (as signposted earlier).

I approached the interview talk having already undertaken some critical examination of the historical, social and cultural context of gendered working and caring practices and discourses. As chapter three makes clear, I had knowledge of the scholarly work undertaken by feminist scholarship on the gendered binaries in social structures and the positioning of women as other. Drawing on my reflexivity, I make visible that this shaped my study and my decision to adopt a blended discourse analysis approach that started with examining these caring and working discourses. Parker (1992) (who situates himself within macro-analysis often labelled, Foucauldian discourse analysis) states, discourses "facilitate and limit, enable and constrain what can be said (by whom, where, when)" (1992: xiii). Whilst I concur, I decided that analysing the discursive practices used in talk

(situated within a more micro-analysis) would complement my understanding of how structures of power are mobilised or resisted by individuals in talk. Advocating a qualitative approach to studying discourse, Edley (2001) contends that analysing talk in interviews facilitates the analysis of a range of ways of talking about or constructing objects and events embedded within discourse resources which are historically, culturally and socially situated. This approach assumes that the parents interviewed are doing things with their language and the way they speak does much more than simply convey a picture of what they are describing.

I concur with Willig (2013) and Howitt (2010) that, the separation between the theory of studying discourse and the procedure of doing discourse analysis is fraught with complexity and is not easily separated. As Potter (2004) points out:

There is no single recipe for doing discourse analysis. Different kinds of studies involve different procedures, sometimes working intensively with a single transcript, other times drawing on a large corpus. Analysis is a craft that can be developed with different degrees of skill. It can be thought of as the development of sensitivity to the occasioned and action orientated, situated, and constructed nature of discourse. Nevertheless, there are a number of ingredients which, when combined together are likely to produce something satisfying. (Potter, 2004: 611)

In line with Potter (2004) I devised a summary of the procedures for my discourse analysis. (See below, Figures 1, 2 and 3.) Willig's (2013) comparative work on Foucauldian discourse analysis and discursive psychology provided an invaluable resource to develop the procedure below. I piloted the procedure after interviewing Shaz, a work colleague who had volunteered to be interviewed. After I had piloted the discourse analysis procedure I discussed it at length with my supervisors who provided helpful guidance to any emerging considerations. I also presented the procedure to peers at academic conferences (see details of the conferences in the appendix) and found this helpful as they shared experiences of the ways documented procedural stages overlap during analysis. Following Taylor's (2001) framing of data analysis as an iterative process, I recognised that it is open-ended and circular. I experienced the procedure of data analysis as overlapping and non-linear, however, for the purpose of systematic analysis, the procedure provided rigor to what was a complex iterative process.

Taylor (2001) states:

As possible patterns emerge, it is useful to note them but continue searching. Eventually there will be a range of possibilities to explore further. It will almost certainly be necessary to focus on some at the expense of others, leaving unfinished avenues for later exploration. Discourse data are 'rich', which means that it is probably impossible to reach a point where the data are exhausted, with nothing more to find in them because the analysis is complete. (2001: 39)

As part of the reflexive process, I recognise Taylor's admission that my examination of discourse practices did not exhaust my analysis. As I make clear, my focus on caring and working discourses dictated that the discursive devices<sup>57</sup> analysed were those which emerged from the excerpts I chose to integrate into the thesis as I critically analysed interview talk in these chosen excerpts. Like Taylor (2001) I see the potential to extend my analysis further in later explorations including wider consideration of discursive devices as part of an analysis of discourse practices and discourse resources.

---

<sup>57</sup> Discursive devices are not the specific words in the conversational sequence but the function they play in the sequence (Edwards, 2007).

#### 4.8 Procedure for analysing the interview talk

**Figure 1** illustrates the procedure of data analysis as I describe it in this chapter. I have adapted this from Willig (2013). I have chosen to use the cog to symbolise complexity in the blended approach I have adopted. Each of the cogs, as a step in the data analysis procedure, is explained in the following pages.

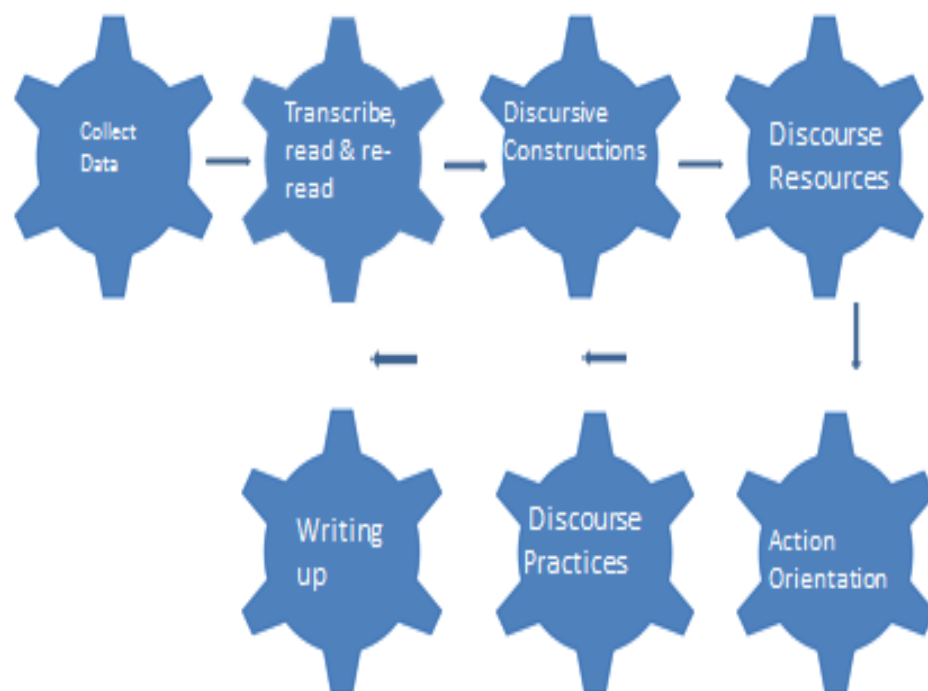


Figure 1.

**Figure 2.** Captures the iterative process, the dynamic interrelationship between the stages with the arrows representing my on-going engagement with analysis including writing up



Figure 2.



**Figure 3.** Captures the messy realities of the data analysis procedure with overlapping and dynamic stages. The arrows represent my on-going engagement with the iterative process of data analysis including writing up. The different sizes of the cogs represent the fluidity of focus as I engaged with the data.



Having devised a summary of the procedure for my discourse analysis, Figures 1, 2 and 3 show that, whilst Figure 1 depicts them as steps (or cogs), I experienced these steps as overlapping and non-linear (Figures 2 and 3.). This was part of the iterative analysis process (Taylor, 2001). For the purpose of this thesis, I will now describe each step or cog to demonstrate how they helped structure and ensure rigor to what was a complex iterative analysis process.

#### **4.8.1 Interviewing, transcription and reading**

During recruitment I agreed an allocated hour long interview slot (although as I state later, this was flexible in response to the participants requests). I recorded the interviews using a Dictaphone. I transcribed all interviews personally, focusing on what I could hear in the accounts. Taylor (2001: 37) states, ‘there is no one

way to do transcription, any more than there is one theoretical approach to discourse analysis'. I aimed to present simplified accessible transcripts for extracting excerpts in the write up step of this procedure (Taylor, 2001). This transcription approach contrasts with more detailed transcription conventions adopted by conversational analysts (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006). This procedure represents my attempt as a researcher, to hear, interpret and produce analytical accounts of the interview talk (Gillies, 2006). This involved, reading the transcript, familiarising myself with it in its entirety as part of the iterative data analysis process.

#### **4.8.2 Discourse constructions**

To consider discursive constructions I focused on the particular ways the participants constructed 'working parent'. I was interested in identifying different ways in which the discursive construction of working parent was constructed in the interview and the meanings ascribed to the working parent construct. This was aided by Willig's (2013: 131) recommendation that, '[b]oth implicit and explicit references need to be included. Our search for constructions of the discursive object is guided by shared meaning rather than lexical comparability'. Thus, I began to identify all sections of the transcript that contribute to the construction of the working parent.

#### **4.8.3 Discourses and discourse resources**

Once I had identified all sections of the transcript that contribute to the construction of working parent, I focused on the difference between constructions. In some instances, what appeared to be the same discursive construction of working parent could be constructed in different ways in the same transcript as the participant drew on different discourse resources. For instance, an interview participant may talk about two different constructions of working parent. They may draw on discourse resources of an economic rationalism discourse *'I go out to work so that I can buy my son nice things'*. They may also say *'My son's care*

*comes first, I'd rather be at home caring for him than working'* thus drawing on discourse resources of a caring discourse. Therefore discourse resources featured clearly in this aspect of the procedure. (A full explanation of discourse resources, its definition, links to the thesis aims and relationship with discourse practices has been detailed earlier in this chapter)

#### **4.8.4 Action Orientation**

This step involved gaining a clear understanding of what the various constructions of working parent are capable of achieving within the text. I focus on the implications for the speaker's interactional concerns and the functions of the language used in constructing particular versions of working parent and the ascribed meaning of these. Broadly, the questions I asked of the data here as follows:

- What is gained from constructing working parent in this way at this particular point within the text?
- What is its function and how does it relate to other constructions within the text?

#### **4.8.5 Discourse practices**

Intersecting with the previous step of action orientation, I considered discourse practices defined as, a vast array of interactional practices (Potter, 2012). For the purpose of this thesis, I make specific reference to the discourse practices of positioning, managing stake and discourse devices which emerged from the interview talk about caring and working. I will now take each of these in turn.

### **Subject Positions**

Willig (2013) defines subject positions as offering different discursive locations from which to speak and act. By constructing particular versions of working parent, the speakers are taking up particular subject positions in particular ways. Edley (2001) note that, a subject position within a discourse, identifies locations for persons within the structure of rights and duties of that discourse, in the context of this thesis subject positions could include husband, worker or father.

### **Stake Management**

The concept of stake has been the focus of Potter (1996) and Edwards (2007). They suggest that, having a stake in a subject position in talk means vested interests, desires, motives and allegiances can be discursively managed particularly if one wants one's version of events to be heard as authoritative and persuasive, factual, not interested or biased. Thus, the interviewee uses discourse practices including positioning, stake management and discursive devices to situate themselves within the norms and practices of discourses thus being prescribed by and prescribing to shared meanings in a reciprocal nature. In the analysis I considered the function of managing stake in the language and gave my interpretation of the ways speakers did this by taking up particular subject positions in their interview talk.

### **Discursive Devices**

According to Yates (2001) the term, discursive devices, originates from the founder of conversational analysis Harvey Sacks. In this sense, discursive devices are not the specific words in the conversational sequence but the function they play in the sequence (Edwards, 2007). Sacks' (1984) original work on discursive devices considered *Doing being 'ordinary'*, meaning speakers construct themselves or the practice (e.g. caring or working) they are describing as ordinary. His work has since been expanded to include other discursive devices. In table 1 below I detail the discursive devices emerging from the data I analysed. To reiterate my earlier point, this table is not exhaustive but captures those devices emergent from the data (Taylor, 2001). Discursive devices originated from conversational analysis and I have located them here under the rubric of discourse practices in line with a blended approach to discourse analysis (discussed earlier in the chapter).

**Table 1. Discursive Devices**

<b>Device</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Reference</b>
<b>Doing being 'ordinary'</b>	Speakers construct themselves or the practice they are describing as ordinary	Sacks (1984)
<b>Discourse markers and fillers</b>	Words such as 'but', 'well', 'so', 'you know' are used by speakers to connect a sentence to what comes before or after. These can be used for topic changes, reformulations, discourse planning, emphasizing points or hedging the reaction of others listening to the speech.	Schiffrin (1987), Cameron (2001)
<b>Pronoun use and footing</b>	Is the speaker talking from the position of 'I', 'we', 'you' or 'one'? What might this function be in the talk?  Footing is the relationship that speakers have to the descriptions they report, e.g. speaking from 'I' to the generic 'we' or 'you'.	Goffman (1979), Benwell and Stokoe (2006)
<b>Extreme case formulations</b>	Using words like 'very', 'tremendous' or 'extremely' are used to strengthen an argument, justification or account. Speakers may do the opposite of this which is called 'minimisation'.	Pomerantz (1986)
<b>Detail in narrative / generic vagueness</b>	Speakers may provide detail in their talk, often to make the account more authentic and plausible. Conversely, people may use strategies of 'generic vagueness'.	Potter (1997) Edwards (2007)
<b>Active Voicing</b>	This is when speakers report the words of others (although we can never know how accurately).  Citing 'actual' conversations provides narrative detail and can be used to increase the authenticity of an account. Speakers may cite others to construct corroboration and consensus	Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998)
<b>Disclaimer</b>	The classic disclaimer, 'I'm not racist / sexist / an expert, but ...'. Potter and Wetherell (1987, p. 77) state, 'The disclaimer attempts to prevent the listener interpreting the talk in terms of the [racist / sexist] identity by acknowledging the possible interpretation and then denying it'.	Potter and Wetherell (1987)
<b>Listing and three part lists</b>	People often list things in their talk. These lists often have three parts, functioning to add detail, authenticate, generalise or normalise some class of things.	Jefferson (1990) Drew, Raymond and Weinberg (2006)

In summary of this step of the analysis procedure, under the rubric of discourse practices, I considered positioning, stake management and discursive devices within the immediate context of participants' talk (the focus of discursive psychology). From here I moved on to consider Foucauldian notions of wider discourses of caring and working. In particular I was interested in interpreting the ways in which dominant discourses of caring and working legitimise and reinforce existing social and institutional structures. In other words I asked, why is it in a speaker's interest to mobilise discourse practices to manage their stake in a particular subject position of a discourse? This involved considering the implications of available power in discourses caring and working and I provided my interpretation of the ways in which wider discourses of caring and working legitimize, regulate and administer institutional practices of paid work and childcare provision (Parker, 1992).

Overall this was the most time consuming step (cog) in the data analysis procedure as the micro-level analysis of discourse practices and macro-level analysis of discourse resources blended significantly.

#### **4.8.6 Writing up the analysis**

The culmination of the procedure was the writing up of the analysis for the thesis. Willig (2012: 111) states that: '[a] discursive analysis always *starts with* discourse'. With the large corpus of data analysis I returned to the discourses of caring and working (considered in chapters two and three) as a pragmatic approach to writing up the analysis. I have organised the data into three data analysis chapters. Chapter five and six are entitled *Discourses of Caring* and *Discourses of Working*. This may appear a crude approach to separating these discourses<sup>58</sup>, however, I found it a pragmatic approach to what was a daunting task of organising and writing the chapters. Importantly, throughout the data analysis I evidence the discourses of working and caring as intersecting. However, I felt that the separation of these chapters in this way was in line with the thesis aims and provided a clear logical structure. In my third data analysis chapter I bring

---

<sup>58</sup> See chapter three for my discussion of the separation of caring and working with reference to Hochschild (1990)

together the data on both caring and working discourses to explore examples of their entanglement and complexity of caring and working as expressed in the interview talk about sick children, cancelled children and delays at work.

As I have made clear the thesis focuses on discourses of caring and working. As Parker (1992) points out, the reification of discourses performs the crucial function of enabling a more effective exploration of power networks.

Discourses do not simply describe the social world, but categorise it, they bring phenomena into sight. A strong form of the argument would be that discourses allow us to see things that are not 'really' there, and that once an object has been elaborated in a discourse it is difficult not to refer to it as if it were real. Discourses provide frameworks for debating the value of one way of talking about reality over other ways.... Discourse analysis deliberately systematises different ways of talking so we can understand them better (Parker, 1992: 5).

Willig (2012) points out that, questioning the taken-for-granted meanings within language and discourse is at the root of social constructionist inquiry. Howitt (2010: 24) argues, '[u]nless one is prepared to buy into this body of theory then the end product will not be recognisably discourse analysis of any sort'. Thus writing up into three data analysis chapters enabled me to ask a number of questions about what sorts of assumptions appeared to underpin what was being said throughout the large corpus of data about caring and working and how it was being said.

The writing up of the analysis was a culmination of the procedure which enabled me to question taken-for-granted assumptions within the interview talk about caring and working, attending to the constructed nature of social reality as it was (re)constructed as a co-production between the participant and myself, the interviewer.

According to Taylor (2001), commencing discourse analysis can be profoundly challenging for researchers. The procedure I have detailed here provided me with steps for analysis for each interview. From the interviews, I developed a significant corpus of data and this provided me with a systematic structure to approach the analysis of each interview transcript without feeling overwhelmed and not knowing where to start. However I feel it is important to reinforce my

earlier point that whilst the steps presented here are clearly delineated, I frame them within an iterative process to capture complexity (Taylor, 2001).

#### 4.9 Summary

In this chapter I have outlined the theoretical, methodological, ethical and epistemological influences on the research. I started by restating the thesis aims before moving on to consider the decision-making processes embedded throughout the production of this thesis. As part of this, I have provided insights into the rationale for my research choices. To this end, I provided an account of my research beliefs and what I consider to be their bearing on the location of this thesis. I have discussed the nature of the complex research relationships and my own positioning throughout the research process. In line with the epistemological stance that knowledge is constructed through language, I believe that the interview interactions were sites of performance where subject positions were taken up and knowledge co-constructed (Burr, 2003). Given that interview participants themselves made relevant in the course of the interviews the complex nature of their positioning within wider discourses of caring and working, I was able to capture the socially situated nature of discourse in action.

*Aim three of this study is to, analyse working parents' interview talk about their working and caring practices to critically consider what discourse practices and discourse resources they mobilise to position themselves within discourses of caring and working.* To meet this aim I note that analysing discourse resources and discourse practices facilitate an examination of interview talk as a fluid, dynamic process of knowledge construction. In this chapter I have discussed the socially situated nature of knowledge construction and those implicated in this knowledge construction. I concur with Mauthner and Doucet (1998: 128) that:

[r]esearchers' individuality, their particular topics, their samples, the theoretical and academic environments and social and cultural contexts in which they work all influence the ways in which these methods are used.



Having made visible these aspects identified by Mauthner and Doucet (1998), I move on to the data analysis chapters of the thesis in order to meet aim three stated above.

## Chapter Five: Discourses of Caring

### 5.1 Introduction

Chapters five, six and seven attend to *aim three, to analyse working parents' interview talk about their working and caring practices to consider critically what discourse practices<sup>59</sup> and discourse resources<sup>60 61</sup> they mobilise to position themselves within discourses of caring and working.* To do this, the following data analysis chapter focuses on discourses of caring.

As I have indicated earlier in the thesis, discourses are sets of material, institutional and language practices which together produce knowledge rather than describing what is already there (Foucault, 1972). I highlight the particular ways the participants constructed working parent, the meanings ascribed to the working parent construct with particular reference to the ways they draw on wider caring discourses. Specifically I consider their discourse practices including the use of discursive devices such as the use of lists (Jefferson, 1990; Drew et al, 2006) and extreme case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986; Edwards, 2007). I consider participants' constructions of working parent; by considering how they draw on caring discourses. These discourses provide meanings which are fluid, relational and plural (Henwood et al, 2008). Thus, parents use language to (re)position themselves and others in these discourses.

I begin by discussing the construction of women as innate carers. I consider talk about intensive mothering practices and use interview excerpts to substantiate my interpretation that the action orientation of sacrificing one's own wellbeing as a carer for the sake of one's child mobilises the construction of women as innate

---

<sup>59</sup> In the spirit of helpfulness, I reiterate that, discourse practices are interactional practices 'Discursive psychologists start with practices and people acting in relation to one another.' (Potter, 2012: 580)

<sup>60</sup> Discourse resources are defined as objects, subjects and versions of social reality available to people (Willig, 2013).

<sup>61</sup> When brought together, discourse practices are defined as what people do in talk, how they use discourse resources and how they orientate to discourse resources (ibid). See chapter four for a detailed discussion.

carer. I explore how mother's and father's talk constructs the complex and varied versions of this sacrifice ranging from sleep deprivation to cleaning the house so it appears 'respectable' to others.

## 5.2 Constructing women as innate carers

In chapter three I have reviewed feminist scholarship which critically considers historic and enduring essentialist constructions of gender and care. In analysing my interview data I found that, emerging from participant's talk, women were constructed as innate carers, namely, naturally predisposed to caring. This was apparent in both mothers' and fathers' talk. They use discourse practices to construct women as having biological traits or genetic make-up that predisposed them to caring.

Chloe: *I think it's in my genes, well all our genes for us women, us mothers to care.* (She worked part-time in care services whilst studying for a degree)

Here Chloe's discourse practices include moving from the personal to the collective using 'my' and 'us', alternating associations with her own experience using personal pronouns 'I' and more collective representations of 'we', to reference the experiences of women more generally. She associates mothers and women, as a collective group, with shared experiences of caring, constructed by drawing on an essentialist discourse of '*I think it's in my genes, well all our genes for us women.*'

Similarly to Chloe, in the following excerpts, Allana, Neil and Sarah construct women as innate carers associating women with motherhood through inference to biological traits of caring.

Allana: *Talking to my friends, before I had the baby, they said 'Oh you'll be a natural, you've got it inside you to be a natural mum, women do. It's your bloke who'll have to learn it'. Funny, as it was my first baby too, but being a mum did come naturally. Being a mum is in my genes.*

Neil: *I say to her, my partner, 'how come I don't think like you about looking after the baby?' I think, I think, don't be stupid they are made that way, women to be mums. It's not part of me like it is her, them.*

*Sarah: For me, before we had kids I knew I'd be better at it than him. Deep inside of me I can just do it, care. I say that to him 'I'm, I mean, us women, are just made that way'.*

In these excerpts, the parents draw on an essentialist caring discourse in which women are constructed as biologically and essentially carers in contrast to men. For instance Neil says, *It's not part of me like it is her.* Similarly to the excerpt from Chloe above, Neil and Sarah's talk moves from the personal to the collective using 'my', 'I', 'us' and 'we', alternating associations between personal pronouns and more collective representations of 'we' and 'us', the experiences of women and men more generally. The speakers achieve this by using active voicing (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998) in their discourse practice. For instance, Neil says, *'I say to her, my partner, 'how come I don't think like you about looking after the baby?'* Active voicing involves the participants reporting someone else's speech to provide narrative detail to increase authenticity in their accounts. By talking in this way, their active voicing (ibid) is used to support their argument that women are natural carers due to their essential biological makeup. Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998) note that this is used to imply an authenticity thus to evidence that they were really said at the time. By reporting someone else's talk, Neil and Sarah both recount previous conversations about the link between women and innate caring ability. By using active voicing they are suggesting that they have evidence of the everyday interactions in the past which evidence the subscription to a belief in women being innately equip to care for others.

Other examples of participants constructing women as innate carers using essentialist biological deterministic discourses can be seen in the following excerpt from Ivy.

*Ivy: You just know you are going to do what you can for your kids because it's a feeling inside you to care for them. It's part of me. Inside. It's the way I'm made.*

*Gemma: Do you mean you learnt it from you own family?*

*Ivy: No, I'm not like them, my family, I suppose my gran was but I sort of feel it is natural ability. I'm not the only one, I know friends who have been in and out of care homes when they were young but they are amazing mums.*

Here Ivy uses detail to justify her argument. She rejects my suggestion that she learnt about caring from her family by using an example of friends who didn't live with their own parents when they were children yet still they became '*amazing mums*' because they had in her words '*natural ability*'. She also uses a disclaimer '*I'm not the only one*' to substantiate her claim (Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

Interestingly when analysing the data, like Ivy who says '*it's a feeling inside you to care for them*', other participants did not explicitly talk using the words *innate*, *genetic* or *biology*. This evidence concurs with Potter and Wetherell (1987) who notes that, in discourse, the speaker does not have to explicitly use specific words in a formulaic way in an account for it to become socially meaningful within a discourse. Through socially meaningful talk, drawing sometimes on terms such as genetic or biology whilst at other times, being less explicit, the participants continued to speak in ways which I interpret as coherent to the biological determinism discourse and what has been historically critiqued in feminist scholarship as essentialism (Hochschild, 1990). The participants use discourse practices flexibly by, for instance, varying the explicit use of words such as 'genes' and 'biology' which are socially meaningful associations with caring discourses.

As I have said in chapter three, essentialism and biological determinism have been debated in feminist literature with many scholars arguing that it usurps the power of women as it has historically been mobilised in a masculinised society which constructs women as subordinate to men due their innate caring abilities supposedly embedded within their genetic make-up (Woollett, Lloyd and Phoenix, 1991). According to Lister (1997) discourses of essentialism and biological determinism subjects women and men to power differences played out in society. Although the participants do not always explicitly talk of this discourse, if we assume a level of agency in their talk in line my adopted blended approach to discourse analysis (Burr, 2003) then I suggest that participants deploy a range of discourses practices including discursive devices and positioning to deploy the language of essentialism and biological determinism in these constructions of women as innate carer.

### 5.3 Caring practices

Intensive caring practices performed by mothers emerged from the excerpts in the talk in which they drew on discourses of essentialism and biological determinism.

*Stan: Well a mother is the one who really you know does the caring for the baby. Women can you know just do it without thinking about it. Whereas men don't have that you know natural thing that women have.*

In this excerpt Stan does not use personal pronouns to position himself in the discourse instead he discursively distances himself by stating generalisations about the collective 'men' and 'women'. His talk differentiates between men and women's 'caring for the baby' on the grounds of an essentialist 'natural thing'. Gender differences are discussed by him to construct women as primary carers in his talk. According to Scott (1994) the positioning of men in opposition to women has been historically, socially and culturally prevalent in essentialist assumptions about women's innate caring nature. Feminist scholarship has long since disputed such essential biological reductionist claims. In Stan's talk these enduring gendered binary assumptions of women's innate caring capacities are present. With reference to Stan's particular discourse practices, he uses "you know" to appeal to me (the interviewer) to agree on account of shared knowledge (Cameron, 2001). 'You know' is a discursive device used to infer a common-sense knowledge that, in essence, women innately care for children. Another similar example can be seen in Rick's comment-

*Rick: Really, I was, er you know, sort of lucky because my ex got up in the night with the baby. You know, she sort of, got on with it and did well sort of everything because she just knew what to do naturally. Women do though, don't they?*

Here Rick's discourse practices indicate tentativeness in his talk. In other words the excerpt suggests that he is thinking about what he was saying carefully to measure my reaction (as listener) and response (Cameron, 2001). For instance, 'Really', 'You know', 'well', and 'sort of' are mobilised by Rick as he talks about caring in his own family. Rick uses "you know" to appeal to a sense of common knowledge about the assumed naturalised and ordinariness of ('she') his ex-partner's caring practices in relation to him as a man and father (Sacks, 1984).

Rick's talk indicates caution and his discourse practices can be interpreted as him speaking tentatively as he gauges my response and reaction to what he is saying about his family's unequal division of care work. In interpreting both Rick and Stan's talk as tentative, I am arguing that they have some awareness of this inequity and their construction of traditional gendered binaries when describing divisions of caring activities in their own family. O'Brien (2005) found that even if fathers cannot share care or opt-out of shared care they still demonstrate awareness that 'sharing' regulates fathering norms. Evidence suggests mothers 'covered' for fathers by presenting father's minimal involvement in childcare as much greater than reality (ibid). Ellison et al (2009) found that many parents were aware of gender inequality in caring responsibilities based on traditional naturalised essentialist construction of women's caring predisposition. Despite parents advocating more evenly shared caring responsibilities Ellison et al (2009) and Emslie and Hunt (2009) found evidence of mothers and fathers arranging their lives along these traditional naturalised gendered assumptions.

Both the men and women I interviewed talked about intensive caring practices when constructing women as innate carers.

*Tiffany: I'm not saying all women are perfect mothers but my hubby well he just doesn't automatically think oh she needs her nappy doing or anything like that caring like whereas I think it's instinctive to me, I just do it.*

In Tiffany's discourse practices here she uses a disclaimer, '*I'm not saying all women are perfect mothers but...*'. Tiffany's disclaimer is a self-permissive discursive device in which she talks about herself as being '*instinctive*' when caring for child (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). In doing so, she is drawing on essentialist discourse of women as instinctive carer, constructing herself in this way whilst positioning her '*hubby*' outside this construction of instinctive carer. Similarly, in the excerpt below, Debbie also uses a disclaimer when positioning herself within essentialist caring discourses (ibid).

*Debbie: I'm not having a go at him but he doesn't have a clue about the kids care needs. He doesn't know what goes on behind the scenes all the extra tasks, with caring for them 24/7. I do, it's just something I do naturally.*

In this excerpt Debbie talk constructs an account of the relationship between herself and her husband using examples of intensive practices of caring to detail her everyday experiences of gender differences. To do this she uses imagery as a discourse practice to depict caring as a performance of many tasks, '*He doesn't know what goes on behind the scenes all the extra tasks*'. Her imagery constructs an imaginary audience and she depicts herself backstage frantically yet '*naturally*' undertaking tasks that often go unnoticed by her husband. In this, she discursively constructs care as complex '24/7' intensive activity as a carer. She states '*He doesn't know what goes on behind the scenes all the extra tasks, with caring for them 24/7*'. This quote formed part of her detailed description about her intensive caring practices. On analysing other transcripts my interpretation was that talk which drew on essentialist caring discourses orientated intensive caring practices in mothering rather than fathering. From all the interview data, I found Debbie's talk provided me with the most vivid interpretation of this. In part, I believe this was due to her use of detail which I interpret as constructing authenticity and plausibility in her account (Edwards, 2007). She uses detail to emphasise the complexity of caring practices as a mother. To explore this in more detail I have chosen the following excerpt from Debbie. This is a succinct chunk of her talk where she eloquently summarises her caring practices. In doing so I demonstrate the blending of discourse resources and discourse practices as they overlap in the analytical approach I adopted.

#### **5.4 Debbie constructs intensive caring as servitude**

In analysing Debbie's talk she explicitly describes herself as a slave to her children, her partner and the caring tasks this encompasses. "*I feel like I'm a slave*" she states. The following detailed excerpt presents Debbie's account of this. In particular, as she describes herself as '*a slave*,' she talks about her compulsion to care for her children and her husband and make her house appear respectably clean.



*Gemma: So how does being a mum make you feel?*

*Debbie: I feel like I'm a slave. Well it's just everything I mean my life it's like there's just so much to do. Right, bottles in the fridge, go to the Tesco, Stan doesn't understand. I'm like out of the house today so I'm thinking- go to the doctors, drop him at school, go to chemist for prescription then I get in, do some ironing, then trying to do things and then my mother-in-law turns up and I just wanted go upstairs and do stuff but I know I'm being daft caring what she thinks about me as a mum but because its not my mum, its my mum-in-law I thought I better do ironing and be with her even though she was playing with the kids. Then I'm trying to make the rooms look respectable. So I tidy one of the kid's rooms then the other to make them look respectable before I go out. Then I try to make the bathroom look respectable.*

*Gemma: And if you hadn't have tidied the rooms, do you think your mother-in-law would have made comments about it?*

*Debbie: Well yeah I'm not a good mum. It's not that, things get messy. You only have to have few shopping bags out or a few clothes out and it looks messy.*

*Gemma: And would she say something?*

*Debbie: No, it's not that, it's just, she's using the bathroom and you want it to be clean and nice. It's just a pride isn't it? I don't want her to think I've left the house in a shit state. I've done what I can. There's washing to be done etc.*

*Gemma: Are there jobs that you do and jobs that Stan does?*

*Debbie: Stan doesn't really see dust really, men don't have that make-up, clean out the toilet, wipe my toilets clean. It doesn't matter about wiping and putting the dishes away but I like them to be clean. I do a lot of dishes. That ruins my hands.*

*Gemma: So does he do certain jobs?*

*Debbie: No, not really, never. I'm the slave, the good mother, at the bottom rung of everyone else on the ladder it's just the way nature made us*

By describing herself as 'I'm the slave, the good mother, at the bottom rung of everyone else', Debbie is constructing herself as a good mother within wider caring discourses. Her talk refers to other people including her children, her husband, Stan and her mother-in-law. Thus by referring to these other people she constructs a hierarchy, positioning herself as, she says, 'at the bottom of everyone else'. To emphasis this, she lists the description 'I'm the slave, the good mother' one after the other in her detailed narrative which describes a multitude of tasks

she undertakes as part of intensive mothering practices (Drew et al, 2006). When I ask, *'Are there jobs that you do and jobs that Stan does?'* she replies that she likes her dishes to be clean and that *'Stan doesn't really see dust really'*. She repeats *'really'* to reinforce her point. Debbie also says *'men don't have that [genetic] make-up'* thus drawing on the innate caring discourse which she extends to include domestic household tasks such as dusting. In her talk she refers to notions of *'makeup'* referring to herself and her husband, constructing differences in genetic / biological makeup along gendered lines of domestic division of labour. As the interviewer, I tried to gain a greater understanding of this point regarding the *'make-up'* of Stan as a man and her as a women who, *'sees dust'*. To do this I asked a probing question, *'So does he do certain jobs?'* to learn more about the division of labour in the home. This formed part of my analysis aimed at how she talked about gender relations namely, male and female differences in caring practices.

*Gemma: So does he do certain jobs?*

*Debbie: No, not really, never. I'm the slave, the good mother, at the bottom rung of everyone else on the ladder it's just the way nature made us*

Her reply uses the extreme case formulation *'never'* which signifies her discursive move from a tentative *'not really'* to *'never'* in quick succession through her talk (Pomerantz, 1986). I interpret this as an example of her doing gender in talk by changing from tentative to a more affirmative certainty of Stan never doing certain jobs in comparison to her. Thus her talk describes detail of the numerous mothering tasks she undertakes as part of her intensive caring practices within the family. She draws on biological determinism discourse by talking about her *'makeup'* as a mother. Interestingly she affirms that Stan does not do certain tasks, suggesting this is inherent within men's *'makeup'*. She refers back to her original point that being a good mother means being a slave. Using imagery of *'at the bottom rung of everyone else on the ladder'*, she reinforces her point, by using talk which presents a picture of a ladder to refer to hierarchy with children and men positioned above her in the ladder hierarchy she mobilises. She says she is on the lowest rung in the hierarchy equating her servitude as positioned within nature's hierarchy using inevitability in her talk by stating *'it's just the way'*.

Discursively, her talk has the effect of legitimizing her comment, '*I'm the slave, the good mother*' while positioning herself as a woman who is naturally persuaded towards servitude to her family through the action orientation of intensive caring practices.

In Debbie's excerpt she constructs an account of the intensive demands of caring and domesticity. She talks about looking '*respectable*', positioning her mother-in-law in an account, constructing her as gazing and judging Debbie's mothering and caring practices.

Debbie: *Then I try to make the bathroom look respectable' and '.....it's just she's using the bathroom and you want it to be clean and nice. It's just a pride isn't it? I don't want her to think I've left the house in a shit state.*

Here her talk constructs a scenario of her mothering tasks being under surveillance by her mother-in-law in which, a '*clean and nice*' looking house is described as respectably meeting the constructed practices of good mothering. With reference to Foucault's (1977) work on *Discipline and Punish* he draws on the symbol of an architectural panoptic tower used for surveillance to consider norms and practices. According to Foucault (1977) these norms and practices can be explored in relation to internalised disciplinary practice in which surveillance of oneself is often undertaken to regulate one's own practices in lines with societal norms. Foucault's symbolic panoptic gaze can be linked to Debbie's talk about wishing to look '*respectable*' in the eyes of other people, such as her mother-in-law. By Debbie positioning her mother-in-law in this way, she is, in accordance with Foucault (1977), surveying herself using her mother-in-law's judgement as testament of the need to meet good mothering norms so that others in society have no evidence to position her as deviant of the good mother construct. Foucault (1988) argued that power relations such as in the family are not simply located in centralised impersonal institutions but located locally. 'They are multiple; have different forms, they can be in play in family relations, or within an institution or an administration' (Foucault, 1988: 38, cited in Mills, 2003: 35) Feminists such as Butler (1993) have developed this idea to argue that power in gender relations is performed rather than possessed. Therefore, individuals can negotiate and renegotiate positions of power within family relations. By

interpreting Debbie's excerpts within this theoretical framing of power in family relations, I would argue that, Debbie is negotiating power within her relationship with her family because she feels that this power is at stake (Potter, 1996; Edwards, 2007) if she does not work at making her home 'respectable' in the norms of domestic chores and good mothering.

The concept of stake has been the focus of interest in Potter's (1996) discourse work on stake inoculation. Potter (1996) suggests, questions of stake are key concerns of participants in interaction. Having a stake in a position in talk means vested interests, desires, motives and allegiances can be discursively managed, particularly if one wants one's version of events to be heard as authoritative and persuasive, factual, not interested or biased. Thus by positioning her mother-in-law in the talk, Debbie substantiates her account of being a good mother in which others would judge her otherwise if needs be. Interestingly, Debbie's talk uses discourse practices to position herself within wider discourse of mothering and parenting and the associated norms and practices. Thus Debbie's talk can be analysed as her being prescribed by and prescribing to shared meanings in a reciprocal nature, accepting and recognising the constitution of shared meanings of good mothering. Debbie constructs this experience as meaningful within the norms and practices of wider society using discourse practices such as stake management (Potter, 1996; Edwards, 2007) to show she is 'walking the walk, talking the talk', the social practices of the mothering and caring discourses meaningful to her and the social group of mothers she ascribes to. Debbie details her caring practices to convey an awareness of the social context of these as a mother. For example she says:

*I know I'm being daft caring what she thinks about me as a mum but because it's not my mum it's my mum-in-law so I thought I better do ironing and be with her even though she was playing with the kids. Then I'm trying to make the rooms look respectable. (Debbie)*

Here she uses the discourse practice of stake management to confess (Potter, 1996) '*I know I'm being daft caring what she thinks*' to acknowledge her vested interest in making her house look 'respectable' to her mother-in-law. Debbie's talk suggests she feels there could be consequences for her if her mother-in-law suggested she wasn't assuming the norms and practices of undertaking cleaning

and caring responsibilities to the level of 'respectability'. In this instance she suggests her reputation is at stake because her mother-in-law might judge her less favourably. She differentiates her mother from her mother-in-law by suggesting Debbie's own mother might give her 'the benefit of the doubt' if she didn't clean the house to a '*respectable*' standard. Thus by citing other people in her talk, Debbie is constructing a complex network of relationships. Thus, Potter's (1997) concept of stake and interest is managed by Debbie.

Mothering norms constructed through judgments of respectability, according to Gillies (2005), are integral to normative mothering practices and policies framed within work and family structures. It is perhaps Debbie's identification of herself as wanting things to appear '*respectable*', rather than '*messy*' and '*shit state*' in the excerpt which contributes to a suggestion that she does not wish to risk her stake as a '*good mother*' by constructed standards of respectability. Her positioning of her mother-in-law in the talk functions as an overseer of Debbie's practices. In talking about the demands and challenges ('*I'm the slave*') of intensive caring and mothering practices, she draws on the women as innate carer discourse to do this.

## 5.5 Working parents talking about the impact of intensive caring

Both the mothers and fathers interviewed talked about the impact of intensive caring practices on parents including themselves and their partners. In the excerpt below, Allana talks about sleep deprivation when describing intensive caring practices, she discloses '*feeling permanently tired*'.

*We get up early to come to work and she (her daughter) does tend to wake up at 6.30am but generally she is a good sleeper but I don't I think I ever caught up from those first 6 months of sleep deprivation. But I don't know because you don't know what's normal. But I was talking to a colleague actually at break today and she had, her children are in their 20s now but it's quite a long time ago now but she remembered the feeling of just exhaustion and also the kind of baby brain thing erm (pause) honestly as soon as I had Ellie and whether that was because I had been in labour for like 2 days or whatever but my brain kind of like turned to mush and even though you know I do come to work and I do my job well and I function, it still doesn't feel kind of quite right (laughs) I don't know whether, some people say its just a myth don't they? But you don't if it's, like you, you know, lack of sleep from a long time ago or*

*(pause) I don't know I don't know. But my partner doesn't you know, he doesn't seem to have, you know, we are quite tired in the week but he doesn't seem to be quite as exhausted as me but I don't know I think you tend to sleep lighter as well with a child possibly (Allana).*

In the detailed excerpt Allana talks of sleep deprivation and links this to her cognitive functioning, namely what she refers to as *'baby brain...my brain kind of like turned to mush'*. To support this claim she presents narrative detail of a conversation with a colleague who, despite *'her children being in their 20's now'* corroborates Allana's claim that feeling exhausted as a parent leads to reduced or differentiated cognitive functioning. Using discourse practices she manages her stake in this claim adding, *'and even though you know I do come to work and I do my job well and I function, it still doesn't feel kind of quite right'*. Thus she suggests she works and does her job *'well'* to counter any claims that she is ineffective at her job or her responsibilities as a mother. Here she demonstrates sophisticated discursive practices which indicate her stake and interest in the worker construct as well as the carer construct. Here we see an intersection of the discourses of caring and working with tensions between constructing herself as a worker and a caring, sleep deprived, selfless mother. She adds detail, acknowledging *'... some people say it's just a myth [baby brain] don't they? But you don't if it's, like you know, lack of sleep from a long time ago.'* As part of this she infers the implication that her ability to be an effective worker is impaired by her intensive caring. She uses *'you know'* and *'some people'* to appeal to me for support and agreement.

Allana also infers that gender relations between her and her partner are different when she talks about feelings of exhaustion compared to her partner. She justifies this with the comment that she sleeps lighter although again drawing on notions of gender differences. She makes a claim that she never caught up sleep after the first six months of her child's life. As I suggest elsewhere, some researchers note that women can experience sleeplessness during pregnancy thus preparing them for sleeplessness after childbirth. For instance, O'Brien (2005) found fatigue and sleeplessness to be significant in mothers and fathers experiences of transition to parenthood. Fathers reported more fatigue than mothers in the first month, possibly because they had not become accustomed to the sleep interruption of late pregnancy, directly experienced by expectant mothers (ibid). Furthermore,

the embodied experience of pregnancy and breastfeeding can differentiate mothers and fathers experiences of sleeplessness. According to O'Brien (2005) these differences are physiological such as women's discomfort as the baby grows inside the womb waking the mother at night or embodied experiences of breastfeeding and pregnancy.

Similarly to Allana, Sarah uses a range of discourse practices to present an account of the impact intensive caring practices has had on her health and wellbeing.

*Sarah: It's great. I love being a mum. I tell my daughter all the time, 'you know I love you to bits' and I do everything for her, everything, all of the time. They are just, I keep a journal of the funny things my 3 year old says because erm she just make me laugh erm she gives me brain-ache sometimes with the questions she asks. 'Mummy why is there air? What happens when people die?' But it's like having a miniature bulldozer all time. Well I think kids are different anyway but she's extremely active. Like there isn't anything she wouldn't attempt to destroy, climb on or jump from. I think I get exhausted to the point of wanting to sleep for days and days. Just get really really exhausted but it's the sacrifice you make as a mum."*

In this excerpt Sarah, refers to exhaustion, repeating 'really really' to emphasise this, giving a sense of being a 'mummy' means sacrificing her own wellbeing. In this excerpt she also repeats 'I do everything for her, everything, all of the time'. By repeating the extreme case formulation 'everything', she suggests that she is willing to sacrifice everything including her own wellbeing for her child (Pomerantz, 1986). Her talk is detailed as she constructs the authentic nature of her description of 'I love being a mum' despite the sacrifices of exhaustion, 'really really exhausted but it's the sacrifice you make as a mum.'

Similarly to Sarah and Allana, in the excerpt below Brad talks about sacrifice and exhaustion when discussing his partner's experience of postnatal depression following the birth of their son.

*Brad: You know, my partner is a really amazingly good mum. What makes her really special is that she was exhausted but carried on giving up her sleep, her health for our daughter really. I tried my best but breastfeeding and no sleep wiped her out but she was really amazing even when she couldn't really get out of bed or anything. She used to say, 'what will people think?' I know people would look at us and think they are not doing it right but they'll see.*

Here Brad's excerpt contains the devices '*You know*' (Cameron, 2001) and extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) '*really amazing*', '*really special*' when talking about his partner. '*You know*' appeals to a sense of shared knowledge about her abilities as a good mum (even though I have never met her). Brad's discourse practices form part of his construction of assurances that his partner was, '*giving up her sleep, her health for our daughter really*' despite her postnatal depression (which he details in the interview). In terms of stake management (Potter, 1996) Brad's talk counters suggestions that Saira was not a good mother and dampen any accusations at stake against assumptions that she was deviant and unable to cope with '*breastfeeding*' and caring for their son. Brad also uses active voicing (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998) '*She used to say "what will people think?"*' This reports conversations with his partner about how their parenting may be viewed and monitored by others. By talking in this way, Brad's active voicing (ibid) provides detail, and he uses it to authenticate his argument that intensive caring involved his partner sacrificing her well-being. Again I interpret this as emerging concerns of surveillance of caring practices within societal norms. Actively voicing about '*what will people think?*' reinforces the point that caring and parenting is monitored by others (Woollett, et al, 1991). Also, the analysis illuminates the intensity of caring and the position of the mother in this (his partner). This reinforces feminist scholarship which argues that mothers are positioned as primary carers with which there is a societal expectation of selflessness and sacrifice (ibid). In considering Brad's use of stake management (Potter, 1996) he says, '*I tried my best*', when talking about his attempts to be a good parent within the parameters of his embodied existence as a man. Drawing again on Foucault's (1977) notion of self-regulation as locally situated power relations, Brad positions himself in relation to his partner. Thus the embodied act of breastfeeding is mobilised by Brad as an example of how providing sustenance to their baby despite this affecting the mother's wellbeing through sleep deprivation and exhaustion is primarily a mothers responsibility.



As I have suggested earlier, research on the different experiences of mothers and fathers during the transition to parenthood found that fathers report experiencing more fatigue than mothers in the first month (O'Brien, 2005). Gatrell (2005, 2007) recognises that fathers do not experience the sleep interruption of late pregnancy or the embodied experience of breast feeding thus may have difficulty adjusting to reduced sleep once a child is born. These physiological differences, together with cultural and historical situated differences in parental leave entitlement, reinforces gendered binaries of male worker and female caregiver (Fatherhood Institute, 2010). Stan's excerpt below demonstrates that, for many parents, sleep deprivation and exhaustion were used as examples to describe caring. For Stan, work-family reconciliation was difficult when he felt 'like a zombie' due to sleeplessness.

*Gemma: So how's it going? How's life treating you being a dad?*

*Stan: Alright. Yeah. Just knackered. And the oldest[child] is in to everything and now, the little one, is a right moaner.*

*Gemma: No sleep eh?*

*Stan: The other night one was screaming for a bottle the other is getting in bed with us and I'm on late shift at work. So I got out of bed, left her (Debbie) to it and got in the oldest [child's] bed. We are like a pair of zombies. And look at me, I'm so unfit. I keep telling her, I need to get out running again.*

In this excerpt Stan suggests he is 'just knackered' in which an emotive 'knackered' is coupled with the word 'just' to provide a description of the ordinariness (Sacks, 1992; Edwards, 2007) and the taken-for-granted nature of being a parent of two young children where exhaustion and sleep deprivation is constructed with an inevitability. This inevitability is expressed with his descriptions of his children's development stage. '*...the oldest [child] is in to everything and now the little one is a right moaner.*' Stan uses the discourse practice of adding detail to give an example of how a night caring for his two children plays out. He says '*So I got out of bed, left her (Debbie) to it and got in the oldest 's [child's] bed*'. This action orientation positions 'her', his reference to his wife as the carer. Stan leaves the marital bed to get some sleep in his oldest child's bed. In this example it is evident that whilst he positions himself as sleep deprived 'just knackered', he takes action to sleep whilst relinquishing the caring responsibility to his wife who is left awake, sharing the marital bed with their

children whilst he sleeps alone in his child's bed. In this sense he positions his wife (Debbie) as primary carer also depicting the taken-for-grantedness of his own exhaustion. Stan's talk describes the performance of mothering and fathering in this excerpt. Gender differences are described by Stan who positions his wife as the primary carer whilst his movement to the other bedroom for sleep elevates his own need for sleep above that of caring for his children or his wife's need for sleep. Here we see an intersection of the discourses of caring and working as he says, *'I'm on late shift at work'* to construct himself as a working parent. Interestingly, his talk gives no detail of his wife Debbie's working hours and whether she has had to get up early to go to work.

Rick's excerpt below is similar to Stan's in that he describes the inevitability of sleep deprivation as a parent yet presents an example of his wife waking up in the night to care for his son whilst Rick sleeps.

*Rick: Parenting, it's just hard, exhausting, tiring. I did bits because I was going to work. And again, to be fair to her, you know she said 'you stay in bed and I'll do it'. And she could spend time during the day sleeping or give our daughter to her mother. I have to be quite honest I didn't have sleep deprivation. In certain ways you know I have to hold my hands up and say I was spoilt in a lot of ways."*

In this excerpt Rick talks of *'Parenting, it's just hard, exhausting, tiring'*, lists *hard, exhausting, tiring* alongside the word *'just'* to construct an inevitability of resigning oneself to parenting being *'just hard, tiring and exhausting'*. His talk also incorporates disclaimers (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) and stake management (Potter, 1996) as he explains that he did not experience sleep deprivation. He positions his wife as intensive carer and himself as worker. He says, *'I did bits because I was going to work'*, using active voicing (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998) *'she said, 'you stay in bed and I'll do it''*. Rick's talk is peppered with discursive devices such as *'you know'* and *'And again, to be fair to her'* as he says his partner was meeting their child's needs in the night because she said, *'you stay in bed and I'll do it'*. In this talk he is constructing an acknowledgment that he stayed in bed whilst she cared for their child in the night. In using these discourse practices Rick is constructing himself as aware that this may be construed as unfair division of caring practices between him and his wife thus he is managing his stake in the construction of these caring practices. He gives examples of times

in the day when his wife '*could*' sleep whilst he was working or his wife's mother could care for the child. This functions to support his argument as to why he stayed in bed and '*did bits*'. Interestingly, in talking about the option that his wife's mother '*could*' care for their child he left me wondering whether this was hypothetical or a practical option for his wife. Clearly the intersection of working and caring is evident in Rick's talk. For instance, in stating, '*I did bits because I was going to work*', Rick mobilises a paid worker subject position to orientate his rationalising of his actions, attempting to excuse his minimal caring in comparison to his wife. I consider this construction of working as minimising caring practices in more detail in my discussion of the discourses of working and also in chapter seven, the entanglement of caring and working.

## **5.6 Summary**

In examining these excerpts in this chapter I found that many parents talked of sleep deprivation and exhaustion when talking about caring for their children. Research suggests that the most intensive period of childcare occurs in the early years of the child's life (Ellison et al ,2009) Interestingly I found that both fathers and mothers talk about feeling tired (to a greater or lesser degree) associated with the child's intense need for care. In the excerpts above, parents linked sleeplessness with reduced wellbeing. In framing this discussion within existing research, the interview talk I have analysed appears to draw on wider caring discourses which essentialised mothers as carers. Some excerpts describe embodied differences, such as breastfeeding capacity, as significant in how parents talk about intensive caring practices. I have illuminated socially constructed differences between mothers and fathers embedded in gendered caring practices. This links back to my discussion in chapter three, specifically in the summary I consider the inextricable connectedness of men and women as they live out gender through interactions with each other as mothers and fathers, workers and carers. By linking chapter three with my analysis here in chapter five I am arguing that, within the rubric of gender relations, it is necessary to include men as social agents alongside women when undertaking research into gender, work and family.

Drawing on a biological determinism discourse, the excerpts presented here demonstrate how women are constructed in talk as innate carers using wide ranging discourse practices including discursive devices, positioning and stake management. My discursive analysis of talk reveals the explicit and implicit ways in which mothers rather than the fathers are constructed as innate carers. The excerpts I have analysed in this chapter provide evidence of the construction of mothers as 'natural carers' (Sevon, 2005). Intensive caring is associated with the selfless mother sacrificing her own needs of sleep for the sake of her children (Woollett et al, 1991) In her study of intensive mothering practices, Fox (2001) found that, women who did intensive mothering responded to their infants' immediate needs, prioritizing their babies on a 24-hour basis. This construction of the self-sacrificing mother positions the mother not as a subject with her own needs and interests but as the fulfiller of a child's needs, caring for and facilitating their child's development (Thomson, Kehily, Hadfield and Sharpe, 2011).

This chapter has extended the discussion in earlier chapters on gender, work and care by suggesting that for participants such as Debbie, caring practices encompass meeting the needs of her partner and domesticity in line with culturally constructed social norms. Recent research by Thomson et al (2011) found that in interviews with sixty two expectant mothers, women prescribe to dominant discourses of women as the primary carer, seeking knowledge from 'experts' and undertaking domestic and direct caring duties. According to Foucault (1977) norms and practices can be explored in relation to internalised disciplinary practice in which surveillance of oneself is often undertaken to regulate one's own practices in lines with societal norms. Using Debbie's talk about '*respectability*' to draw out this interpretation of caring practice, I have suggested Debbie is constructing locally situated power relations in which other mothers (Debbie's mother-in-law) are situated to regulate practices.

Constructions of the women as innate carer raise questions about inherent contradictions. On the one hand this draws on a sense of ordinary and naturalised caring. Whilst on the other hand, it presents a sense of challenge and struggle in sacrificing one's own needs for that of others. By assuming that women possess a natural caring and nurturing aptitude, women are socially constructed as naturally suited to mothering. Wager (2000) considers this critically arguing that,

hegemonic discourses of femininity construct women in such a way that they 'are supposed to have maternal instincts which destinies them to have children and [to] subordinate their own interests to those of their offspring.' (2000: 390). These discourses of good and bad mothering are represented in parenting literature, health care, the popular media and policy (Thomson et al, 2011). They are inescapable, homogeneous and ethnocentric (Letherby, 2003; Gillies, 2005). With this in mind, the excerpts analysed above highlight how the participants talk constructs plausible and authentic accounts of caring by working parents.

The discourse analysis of this chapter has used excerpts to reveal the complex ways parents use discourse practices, positioning, stake management and discursive devices when talking about caring for their children. By attending to the details of parent's accounts, this analysis has revealed how both mothers and fathers mobilise a prevailing essentialist discourses to describe intensive caring practices and mother's primary responsibility of these practices. I argue that my use of discursive analysis has provided a rich understanding of the ways in which mothers and fathers construct their caring practices discursively. I return to this point in the forthcoming chapters. In chapter eight, *Concluding discussions* of this thesis I suggest ways in which this study contributes to knowledge by informing the ways in which parents, policy makers, researchers and scholars can consider the interrelationship between discourse, gender and working parents in the future, particularly against the backdrop of change and continuity that I have outlined in chapters two (*Work-family reconciliation policy landscape*) and three (*Gender, work and care*).

## Chapter Six: Discourses of working

### 6.1 Introduction

Following the same procedure of data analysis throughout the thesis, in this chapter I focus on excerpts from interview talk to analyse the discursive practices used and the wider discourses of working drawn on by the interviewees and the ways they position themselves within these. In particular, this chapter focuses on their use of discursive practices to construct themselves as paid workers, drawing on discourse resources which legitimise constructions of themselves as working parents. Again, in the spirit of helpfulness, I signpost aim three as the focus of this chapter whilst noting I also consider its relationship to aims one and two in my discussions.

### 6.2 Constructing paid work outside the home as ordinary

The following excerpts focus on talk constructing paid work outside the home as ordinary. Sacks (1984) describes doing being ordinary as a discursive device within discourse practices of talk. Michala, Brad and Debbie say paid employment is not a particularly enjoyable experience but is 'ordinary' (Edwards, 2007).

*Michala: Normally I go out to work every morning at 7.30am. That's an ordinary day. Not fun but it has to be done. I still care for my family but when I'm out at work I focus on work. (Michala, a full-time care professional)*

*Brad: I'm not a fan of getting up on a Monday morning going off to work but I've always done it, even as a paper boy. Even on cold, wet, wintry dark mornings. That's life. (Brad is a full-time scientist)*

*Debbie: I work. I don't always enjoy going out work but I work, like all good parents." (Debbie is a part-time legal services professional)*

They construct paid work with a naturalised ordinariness by using 'That's an ordinary day' (Michala), 'That's life' (Brad) and 'I work like all good parents' (Debbie). Here they talk about 'ordinariness' within their discourse practices, drawing on and intersecting the discourses of working and parenting to construct

paid employment as an ordinary aspect of life shared by many other 'good parents' with the word good used as moralised ordinariness (May, 2008a).

In these excerpts, Brad uses extreme case formulation (ECF for short) '*always*' (Pomerantz, 1986) and discourse marker '*even*' (Schiffrin, 1987) to justify his construction of himself as a legitimised worker within societal norms and practices. Similarly, Debbie uses repetition '*I work... I work*' together with extreme case formulation '*always*' (Pomerantz, 1986) to reinforce and strengthen her point that working is not always enjoyable but she does it. Edwards (2007:33) states that:

ECFs are descriptions and assessments that include extreme, ultimate, or end-of-the-continuum expressions such as *never*, *always*, *brand new*, *everybody*, *the best*, and *nobody*. They maximize the quality or state of affairs to which they are attached, generally when there are grounds (as with recounting unusual experiences) for expecting an unsympathetic hearing.

According to Lister (1997) and Daly (2010) the duty to engage in paid work has been historically embedded in UK family policy, constructed on notions of individual responsibility to the family as part of a more general appeal to family values and active, economically engaged citizenship. In the excerpts above, Michala, Brad and Debbie draw on and position themselves within wider discourses of working and parenting with descriptions of their economic activity within the labour market. These excerpts demonstrate how discourses of parenting and working intersect in their constructions of the working parent. Lister (1997) notes that paid work is a means of honouring general citizenship obligations.

Through analysing parents' talk I found constructions of paid work drawing on references to being outside the home as ordinary (Sacks, 1984). As part of these constructions, their talk emphasised the value of paid work. According to Williams (2010) dominant discourses of working have historically, socially and culturally been constructed on notions of masculinised ideal worker. These assume paid work outside the home is ordinary however these assumptions have historically marginalised women. Lister (1997) states that, when constructions of ordinariness of paid work outside the home are contrasted with tasks undertaken in the private sphere, such as care, the latter tend to be discounted. This devalues caring for others and also undermines the value of the contribution to society made by

individuals, a point I explore in more detail in forthcoming chapters on the intersections of caring and working.

As stated in earlier chapters, systemic barriers such as poor formal childcare provision and structural inequalities reinforce traditional binaries of public / private domains and associated gendered assumptions of caring at home by women and paid work in the public domain by men (Hochschild, 1990). Doucet (2006) notes that, the dominant construction of working being situated outside the home is enduring despite changes taking place within families and the ways people work. The enduring public/private binary has been detrimental to those stay-at-home fathers, women (as predominant carers) and families who approach caring and working responsibilities in alternative ways (to these historically gendered binary constructions) to meet their nuanced financial and family circumstances (ibid) in early twenty-first century Britain. I extend this point in chapter eight, recommending a newly named Department of Care, Work and Pensions to stimulate discourses which (re)evaluate care alongside work.

### **6.3 Positioning their own parents in constructions of paid work**

Emerging from the data I found that when parents constructed themselves as workers they often positioned significant others such as relatives and friends in these constructions. As part of this, they cited their own parents in shaping their knowledge and understanding of parenting and working (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998). The excerpt below from Stan demonstrates this:

*My dad used to say, 'you've got to get out there and earn a crust. Work hard and reap the rewards' (Stan, a full-time public service worker).*

Here Stan uses both active voicing and imagery, '*My dad used to say, 'you've got to get out there and earn a crust.'*' to provide narrative detail and present authenticity in his account of constructing himself as an economically active parent (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998). '*Earn a crust*' imagery is used to refer to the crust of a loaf of bread which is linked to the breadwinner construction. Stan's talk positions his own father as a significant influence in shaping Stan's understanding of working as ordinary (Sacks, 1984). In actively voicing his father's words, Stan is



discursively practising substantiation and authenticity, citing his father's encouragement, '*get out there*' and '*reap the rewards*'. Similarly, in the following excerpts Michala and Rick use active voicing in accounts of how their parents encouraged them to engage in paid work.

*Michala: My folks owned a shop so always said, 'we work all hours to give you nice stuff'. (Michala is a full-time professional care worker)*

*Rick: My dad was a grafter, 'I put the hours in at work for your nice things' he used to say.*

As both Rick and Michala's excerpts demonstrate, both their own mothers and fathers were cited in the participants' talk as influential in the construction of shared meanings about the importance and value of paid work to parents in providing '*nice stuff*' and '*nice things*' for them as children.

Following on from this, Leila uses active voicing, citing her mother's words to construct the value of paid work.

*Leila: "My mum didn't work when I was a kid, but she always said 'get out there and get yourself qualifications and you can get a good job. Something to be proud of.'" (Leila is a part-time care professional)*

Notably, in Leila's excerpt above she uses the disclaimer (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) '*My mum didn't work when I was a kid but....*'. In this discourse practice, Leila is using the disclaimer to acknowledge the influence of her mother in encouraging her to work despite her mother not working herself when Leila was 'a kid'. In this excerpt Leila constructs paid work as '*Something to be proud of*.' Thus Leila is talking about paid work being a positive part of engaging with society's in what Sacks (1992) describes as ordinariness. Similarly to the earlier excerpts Leila's paid work construction is '*out there*' meaning in the public domain.

Later in Leila's account she describes how her mother's employment was not continuous, with years spent caring for Leila rather than working. In Leila's talk, active voicing is used to describe how Leila's mother emphasised the place of paid work in Leila's future and the value of this as '*Something to be proud of*'. What is interesting here is that employment outside the home was something to be proud of whilst the caring work Leila's mother undertook '*whilst I was a kid*' is constructed with the use of a disclaimer (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). In constructing care and

paid work differently, paid work is given a value whilst caring isn't by Leila in her excerpt.

According to Rowbotham (2012) there is evidence of the historic endurance of the gendered division of unpaid care and paid work and the associated differential values accorded these both socially and historically. The comments below highlight the way in which stay-at-home mothers are given less status than those engaged in paid work. These excerpts also evidence the intersection of caring and working which I discuss later in the thesis.

*Allana: Yeah. I think its more kind of that a stay-at-home mum doesn't really have any real status unfortunately". (Allana is a part-time professional working in the service sector.)*

*Chloe: "I'm not a mumsy mum. What I mean is, I'm not a stay-at-home mum, I've not gone the whole hog, I think people look down on you if you don't work at all." (Chloe, is a part-time care worker and student)*

Drawing on the wider feminist arguments I reviewed in chapter three regarding the historical and cultural subordination of unpaid care work, I argue that stay-at-home mothers and, more latterly, stay-at-home fathers, undertake parenting and caring tasks in the private sphere of home which tend to be contrasted against a dominance of importance of paid work to society (Lister, 1997). The excerpts from Chloe and Allana reinforce my earlier points that, constructions of paid work have what Allana describes as 'real status'. In contrast, as Allana says 'a stay-at-home mum doesn't really have any real status unfortunately.' Her use of 'unfortunately' adds an element of fatalism within her construction. Chloe's use of imagery, 'I think people look down on you if you don't work at all', substantiates the argument that paid work is often associated with cultural value (Gambles et al, 2006).

In the following excerpt Rick provides a complex account of his own parents' work-family reconciliation.

*Rick: I mean, from my point of view, my parents worked. I was brought up by 2 hard working parents. You know, when I was at school we either had to go to other people's houses or I mean my mum did everything up until I was about 6 years old and then she was out working too as my dad's secretary.*

Interestingly, Rick chooses to begin his statement by focusing on paid work when referring to his parents. This is similar to Leila's excerpt and the centrality of paid

work to the construction. Rick does not refer to his parents as patient, fun or loving for instance. “*Worked*” and “*working*” are words used by Rick to emphasise its importance to the construction of his parent’s identities, as well as his own. He depicts his family constituted by ‘*two hard working parents*’. He uses ‘*you know*’ to appeal to my understanding (Cameron, 2001) explaining that paid work resulted in both his parents being absent from the home. He gives an example of being cared for by people other than his parents who were at work, ‘*...when I was at school we either had to go to other people’s houses*’. Interestingly although he states that both his parents were hard working, he describes his mother as being present and the main caregiver until Rick was aged six. “*I mean my mum did everything up until I was about 6 years old and then she was out working as my dad’s secretary*.’ Thus, paid work is embedded in his construction of his father whilst he constructs mother as carer first then worker. Similarly to Leila’s earlier excerpt, Rick describes his mother as not working continuously because she cared for him as a child. As I have discussed in chapters two and three, women characteristically do not have full-time continuous employment throughout their life course to the same extent as men as they have historically undertaken a higher proportion of caring. Thus the construction of paid work, in what Sacks (1984) describes as ordinary, is within gendered assumptions that Ricks’ father worked whilst Rick’s mother and Leila’s mother did not work continuously because they were caring for them as children. Given that in chapter two I consider macro-level, large scale data of mothers increasingly entering the labour market, predominantly in part-time paid work, Rick and Leila provide examples of this in their own accounts.

#### **6.4 Rick, his own father and constructions of the provider father**

Chambers (2012) notes that, although Anglo-American work-family policy discourse attempts to involve fathers more directly in parenting, the primacy of paid work continues to be influenced by traditional notions of the male provider within the family. In the following excerpt, Rick talks about a hard working father providing for his family’s material needs through paid employment. He draws on a provider father discourse by giving examples of material possessions such as ‘a

*nicer home and a garden'* accessible to his daughter through Rick's paid employment.

*Rick: I think from that point of view, I just think, I just want more things. I'd rather have a nicer home and a garden. I know maybe that sounds quite materialistic? Maybe I'd like to have had my dad around more? Maybe I would? But I'd rather have an environment which is going to set her up for life and is going to inspire.*

Following on from the previous section, this excerpt evidences Rick constructing his father as a provider who was not *'around more'*. *'Maybe I'd like to have had my dad around more? Maybe I would?'* Rick's use of *'I'd rather'* suggests his *'trade off'* between unpaid caring and paid work. He uses repetition *'I just think, I just...'* when explaining his paid work and child care choices. As part of this he refers to the choices his own father made to prioritise paid work which meant he was often out of their home working. Also, by posing questions, *'I know maybe that sounds quite materialistic? Maybe I'd like to have had my dad around more? Maybe I would?'* Rick shifts positions between certainty and more ambivalent talk with the repetitive use of *'Maybe'* (Cameron, 2001). Rick's talk suggests he is trying to make sense of his identity as a father, using his own father as a point of reference. This concurs with Henwood, et al (2008) who found that, in their study of men and masculinity, fathers often talked about themselves with reference to other fathers including their own. In the case of Rick, his talk reveals a tension in the discourses of caring and working linked to the challenges he experiences of reconciling the demands of his worker identity and the demands of caring for his child.

According to O'Brien (2005) changes in policy stimulated generational transitions in fathering norms and practices. In particular, rather than fathers being constructed as family providers within a historically enduring *'economic'* norm, policy such as The Work and Families Act (2006) emphasised both the caring and economic responsibilities of fathers. In Ellison et al's (2009) study of how contemporary British fathers experience and think about work and care they found that the majority of modern fathers are non-traditional<sup>62</sup> in their views. In addition,

---

<sup>62</sup> Non-traditional, meaning involved in both caring and working, is used by Ellison et al (2009) to contrast the traditional male father provider construction.

they found fathers hold less traditional views than mothers although in practice, in heterosexual couples, most fathers still work full-time and whilst female partners provide the bulk of childcare within the family (ibid).

When talking about his economic and caring responsibilities as a father, Rick's discourse practices can be analysed using the concept of stake (Potter, 1996; Edwards, 2007). According to Potter (1996) speakers have a stake in a subject position in talk based on vested interests, desires, motives and allegiances which can be discursively managed particularly if one wants one's version of events to be heard as authoritative and persuasive, factual, not interested or biased. Thus, in the excerpt above, Rick constructs a persuasive account of his work and family arrangements. As part of this, Rick pre-empts and counters any accusation or claim that he is '*materialistic*' as he details '*I'd rather have a nicer home and a garden. I know maybe that sounds quite materialistic?*' To substantiate this he states '*But I'd rather have an environment which is going to set her up for life and is going to inspire to.*' In drawing on wider discourses of working he presents an economic rationale (Kahu and Morgan, 2007), he positions himself as a provider within the worker discourse to construct himself as a good parent (Collier, 2012).

## 6.5 Stan constructs the provider father as ordinary

Similarly to Rick, Stan constructs himself as a provider father by referring to '*other dads*' and the ordinariness of the provider fathers (Sacks, 1992). This is evident in the following excerpt.

*Stan: Everyone knows what a dad does. He works and does what he can for his kids. (Stan is a full-time public service worker)*

Stan positions himself discursively amongst his contemporaries saying, '*Everyone knows what a dad does. He works and does what he can for his kids.*' Interestingly, apart from paid work, he does not state any other specific tasks he associates with fathering practices and does not pinpoint specific caring tasks. Stan constructs a father by placing significance on being an economically active father in paid employment.

In the excerpt below he talks about working to earn a wage to provide for his children by drawing on discourses of working.

*I know now I am a provider for my family. It's not a matter of oh you know I can do what I want with my wages. My wages now go towards, you know, baby clothes, nappies (which are very expensive) those baby wipes, all that stuff. Yeah I work to provide that stuff, you know. Stan, full-time public service worker.*

In this excerpt, Stan uses a range of discourse practices including a detailed list of the material items he buys with his wage to provide for his children's care needs. Drew et al (2006)) state that, lists are discursive devices functioning to add authenticity and plausibility to talk. Alongside Stan's use of lists he also uses more generic vagueness '*all that stuff*' which he repeats to add emphasis to his point that '*stuff*' is vague yet necessary (Potter, 1996). Stan finishes this point with '*you know*' appealing to my shared understanding of '*stuff*' and the many things he has listed that the child requires (Cameron, 2001). Stan's discourse practices construct the provider father by mobilising discourses of economic rationalism (Kahu and Morgan, 2007). In other words, Stan constructs a detailed account to authenticate him as a father who provides for his child's material needs. Stan extends his discussion in the following excerpt in which he discusses the relationship between working and providing for his children.

*Working is one thing but providing is up there as being responsible, doing your bit for your offspring, your own. I'd hate someone to say, 'Oh look at the kid in those old worn clothes, his dad is in the bookies though'. How awful would I be as a dad, gambling away my wages? (Stan)*

In analysing this excerpt, Stan's talk contains active voicing '*I'd hate someone to say, "Oh look at the kid in those old worn clothes, his dad is in the bookies though. How awful would I be as a dad, gambling away my wages?"*' This example illuminates how his subject position demonstrates some recognition of his stake within discourses of working (Potter, 1996). Stan is constructing himself as a provider father with reference to talk about how other people may position him as a father. Edley (2001) describe this as an investment in discourses. For instance, when analysing this excerpt using Potter's (1996) concept of stake, Stan positions himself as a provider father to orientate his actions towards good fathering. Discursive devices such as the extreme case formulation '*I'd hate*' and '*awful*' are

used by Stan as he provides a detailed account of two versions of fathering, namely the good provider father and the gambling father. By constructing himself as a provider father and talking of the contrasting imaginary other 'gambling' father, he acknowledges that, the latter could be dismissed or discredited. In this sense, Stan constructs the account on the grounds of stake and interest in being positioned in the former version, the good provider father, rather than the latter. Drawing on Foucault's (1977) work on *Discipline and Punish*, Stan's excerpt can be interpreted as internalised disciplinary practice of surveying oneself to regulate one's own practices in lines with societal norms and his stake in these (Potter, 1997). Foucault's symbolic panoptic gaze can be linked to Stan's talk about '*I'd hate someone to say, 'Oh look at the kid in those old worn clothes, his dad is in the bookies though'*'. According to Foucault (1977), talking about others judgement of oneself is testament that power relations are not simply located in centralised impersonal institutions but located locally within interactions with others.

Linking Stan's excerpt alongside my earlier reviewed literature in chapter three on masculinity, I acknowledge the multiplicity of versions of the father. According to Connell (1995: 185) 'masculinities [and femininities] come into existence at particular times and places and are always subject to change'. Within this conceptualisation, not all fathers are deemed good fathers. Rather, the worker and provider are given credence as socially acceptable versions of masculinity. According to Williams (2010) systemic changes to work and family structures pose everyday challenges to fathers. 'Men who are not breadwinners are caught between the breadwinner ideal and an economic era that doesn't deliver the family wage' (Williams, 2010: 81). O'Brien's (2005) evaluation of men's participation in working and caring found that in all types of families, parental involvement is a trade-off between money, time and care. In particular she calls for future research which clarifies the extent to which investment in care can be offset against investment in financial resources to provide for a child's needs (ibid). This links to my discussion in chapter three of the burgeoning research on stay-at-home fathers.

## 6.6 Brad constructs a 'trade-off' as a working father

As Brad's excerpt below reveals, the demands of being a provider whilst also being involved in providing direct care often leads to choices and trade-offs between doing lifestyle activities as an individual and caring for your child's needs.

*Brad: I used to stay behind and go for a drink with the lads after work but now it's less because I need go home and do my bit before she's in bed. (Brad is a full-time scientist)*

In this excerpt he draws on a discourse of working linked to notions of camaraderie and time spent with colleagues. Studies considering the relationship between paid work and masculinity by Williams (2010) and Willott and Griffin (1997) reveal that forms of camaraderie and social networking activities such as drinking after work can form part of hegemonic masculine norms of the ideal worker. Interestingly, in the excerpt above Brad talks about the past tense '*I used*' to describe his previous involvement in social activities which consolidated his working relationships. He adds '*now it's less*' as he suggests that he has minimised but not stopped going out with his colleagues after work since becoming a father. This corroborates Williams' (2010: 81) findings:

Ideal worker norms police men into breadwinner roles, this not only hurts women, it also hurts many men who cannot live up to the breadwinner ideal...A surprisingly high number of men who live up to the old fashioned breadwinner ideal do not endorse it. (Williams, 2010: 81)

Brad's excerpt can be interpreted as struggling with the challenges Williams (2010) describes. For instance, he describes caring as '*do my bit*' with '*bit*' reflecting a short time or marginal caring activity before '*she's [his daughter is] in bed*'. His talk reveals a complex interweaving of Williams' (2010) masculine ideal worker norms of '*drinking with the lads after work*' interspersed with words describing his caring activities at home. Referring to his colleagues as '*the lads*', ascribes a juvenile quality which is in contrast to the responsibilities of a man when he becomes a father. Brad, like many of the other fathers in the interviews, talked about the challenges of living up to the expectations of fathering and its responsibilities to care for children rather than simply caring for oneself. According to Dermott (2008) there is a discrepancy between what contemporary fathers



profess as a strong commitment to being involved with their children and the realities of how this is lived out.

As discussed in chapter three, scholars of men and masculinity have debated the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Whilst Donaldson (1993: 2) describes it as 'slippery' it refers to the social, political and cultural dynamics by which particular social groups establish and sustain power. As particular versions of masculinity are reproduced to establish and maintain dominance in relation to others, it acknowledges the ways in which masculinities [and femininities] are fluid, dynamic and become visible at particular times and places (Connell, 1995). In many of the excerpts, fathers talk about providing for their children and families by drawing on discourses of working. My interpretation is that, the provider father is one such culturally exalted way of being a man in the UK today. In this analysis of talk, the concept of hegemonic masculinity can be mobilised to interpret the ways in which fathers who are unemployed or unpaid carers are seen as 'other' and subordinate to the provider father (Willott and Griffin, 1997). Connell (2001) notes that practices, such as fathering, are culturally and socially located with historical situations, reproduced through daily action. In analysing the interviews of men talking about fathering, their localized everyday experiences of fathering are constructed by drawing on discourses of masculinity and working.

Hauari and Hollingworth's (2009) study of *Masculinity, diversity and change* found that the financial provider father continues to hold relevance in contemporary Britain. However, research findings on gender, work and family undertaken by Warin, Solomon, Lewis and Langford (1999), Gatrell (2005) and Gregory and Milner (2008) suggests that social, political and economic changes have influenced the complex picture of parent's lives within contemporary Britain. Miller's (2010) study of father's transition to parenthood found father's recognised a need to participate in a range of direct caring activities alongside their paid work. Fathering research by Doucet (2006) focused on Canadian primary care-giving fathers<sup>63</sup>. Doucet (ibid) found that, throughout the life course, material and caring

---

<sup>63</sup> Doucet's criterion for selecting fathers was that they self-defined themselves as primary care-giver. She chose fathers who had on a minimal length of time as primary caregiver of at least one year. This assumes that during the specified number of exact hours as primary caregiver, fathers were devoting themselves exclusively to childcare and housework, variable on children's age, family resources, social networks and

arrangements can change. In presenting a complex interplay of paid care and unpaid care, she states, 'I would argue that men are, in fact, radically revisioning caring work, masculine conceptions of care, and ultimately our understandings of masculinities' (Doucet, 2007: 238). For Collier (2012) this evidence from both sides of the Atlantic draws attention to the myriad of material and caring arrangements based on nuanced maternal and paternal working and caring patterns. By using excerpts from the transcripts I give examples of how parents talk about these arrangements. This discussion is extended in chapter seven where I given detailed examples of nuanced work and care arrangements taken from the interview excerpts.

## **6.7 Constructions of paid work as minimising time spent on caring activities**

In the excerpt below, Rick (a full-time retail sales consultant, separated from partner with a 18 month old daughter Anya) describes his complex working and caring arrangements.

*Rick: Well I'd like to spend quality time with my daughter but I'm still climbing the ladder at work and you know that's why. Probably in the first year. I don't know the honest answer is, it was all a bit of a surprise becoming a dad and its all sinking in. I mean I would like to spend more time with her but with the way I work wont allow me to. I mean for example Sunday I had to be in Scotland. I stayed there Sunday night, Monday night, got home Tuesday night about nine o'clock. I mean today is probably a rarity I got here for this 6pm interview and tomorrow I've got a case at 4pm in Liverpool so I will probably home about seven or eight pm. My mum and dad are good because they pick her up from her mother's. They don't live locally but have two houses about one hundred miles apart so they drive from one, pick her up then drive to the other house where I go to them after work.*

In this excerpt Rick talks about his paid work consuming time spent with his daughter. To do this, Rick uses listing (Jefferson, 1990; Drew et al, 2006) to detail the nights of the week in which he stayed away from home due to work commitments in another part of the country. Rick uses a disclaimer '*Well I'd like to*

---

whether fathers were balancing flexible paid work with childcare responsibilities. Doucet's (2006) research included single fathers and stay-at-home fathers self-defined as primary care-giver.

*spend quality time with my daughter but I'm still climbing the ladder at work and you know that's why*. Here Rick uses discursive devices (Schiffrin, 1987) '*and you know that's why*' to appeal to my agreement based on the assumed rationale that "*I'm still climbing the ladder at work*" acts as a barrier to what Rick describes as '*quality time with my daughter*.' Rick uses these to perform caution in his talk (Cameron, 2001). He says, '*Probably in the first year. I don't know the honest answer is, it was all a bit of a surprise becoming a dad and its all sinking in*'. This functions to explain how he feels about becoming a father. Rick uses imagery to depict '*climbing the ladder at work*' alongside disclaimers (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) to suggest becoming a dad '*was all a bit of a surprise becoming a dad and its all sinking in*'. Thus Rick talks about the challenges he is experiencing as a new father with aspirations of achievement in his employment alongside aspirations to "*spend more quality time*" with his daughter within Rick's caring commitments.

Similarly to Rick, Stan and Brad talk about their full-time work. In particular they construct full-time work as taking up time which could be spent caring for their children.

*Stan: My jobs full-time obviously, Monday to Friday and I'm on call at weekends. Me and my missus make it work with the kids.*

*Brad: I'm away from home four nights a week then work from home Fridays. I'm still working on Friday but our daughter does get to have me in house I suppose. Not ideal but that's why I'm studying a part-time Masters degree in a subject away my field so I can change jobs in the future.*

Their talk describes minimal time spent in the home undertaking caring activities with the children. Their talk orientates their actions to paid work and in doing so reveals minimal direct caring in comparison. In Stan's statement '*My job's full-time obviously*', using the word '*obviously*' infers certainty with full time work normalised within taken-for-granted knowledge of ordinariness (Sacks, 1984). Although my review of the literature in earlier chapters suggests paid work for fathers does not necessarily mean full-time, Stan's talk constructs full-time work without doubt or question '*obviously*'. He asserts, '*Me and my missus make it work with the kids*.' Stan's talk positions his wife in their intricate caring and working arrangements illuminating the relational aspects of these arrangements to, as he says, '*....make*

*it work'* which, in reality, involves her working part-time. I will consider the construction of part-time work later in this chapter however, Stan's talk draws on both caring and working discourses and his talks intersects these to explain how he and his wife arrange work and caring within their own family thus giving insight into how gender relations are played out in his family.

## 6.8 Flexible working

Following on from the excerpts above, Brad talked about flexible working. For instance, Brad used tentative talk by volunteering that his working and caring arrangements are *"Not ideal but that's why I'm studying a part-time Masters degree in a subject away my field so I can change jobs in the future."* Similarly this recognition that working and caring arrangements can be altered was found in Allana's talk about her family's future plans thus they construct themselves as agents of change in their own individual circumstances as families.

*Allana: I work three days. My partner loves our daughter and I think it has been a shame that he is working full-time, 5 days a week. Now he's about to change jobs hopefully that will offer him a bit more flexibility, perhaps flexibility, working at home or condensed hours. That's something that we will explore in the next few months really. It may, it may make it a bit easier because he's had to get another train or take a long walk after picking my daughter up from nursery. We are thinking of putting our daughter into a nursery closer to home but that would have a huge impact on starting or finishing times of work. (Allana, a part-time professional working in the service sector)*

Similarly to Brad's excerpt, Allana's excerpt states that her partner is *'...about to change jobs hopefully that will offer him a bit more flexibility, perhaps working at home or condensed hours.'* Thus both Allana and Brad talk about changing jobs. Using discursive devices they construct changing employment as enabling. For instance, Allana lists potential options of *'flexibility, working from home or condensed hours'* (Cameron, 2001). She talks of these options as *'hopefully'*, providing opportunities for more time away from paid work to care for their daughter. Interestingly, Brad talks about his plans for a career change enabled by *'a Masters degree'*. He constructs some fields of work or industries as being more conducive to effective work-family reconciliation than others. In contrast, Allana

positions her partner's employer and organisation as influential in providing more workplace flexibility (he is a public service worker moving jobs from one organisation to another in the same city.) The Flexible Working Taskforce (2009) found that both the individual employer and field of employment have an influence over the type of flexibility offered to parents (Department of Work and Pensions, 2009b). Ellison et al (2009) found that flexible working varies greatly across sectors of work and also occupational hierarchy. The Confederation of British Industry (2009) in their research into flexible working found that 63 per cent of employers said that flexible working practices had a positive effect on recruitment and retention. The excerpts here reveal a complex picture of flexible working linked to my earlier review in chapters two and three. To explain this complexity in more detail I present a detailed excerpt taken from my interview with Michala. (As I have said, only two women, Michaela and Ivy, worked full-time).

*Michala: Yeah. Erm I'm on work-life balance so contracted full-time for 37 hours but I do that over 4 days compressed. So the whole service was getting reviewed and they tried to take it off me but I fought for it really and they agreed it. They said it was under a different rule because I had a child under 5. A policy about if you've got a child under 5 they have to be more flexible.*

*Gemma: So until your daughter is 5 you can you do this?*

*Michala: No. It's reviewed annually in April so it's under review again. So I can request to do a 4 day week. I'll probably not get it. I don't think I'll get it cos they don't like you doing a 4 day week. I don't think the service manager likes you doing a 4 day week. So I've asked if I can't have a 4 day week, can I have a 9 day fortnight. So that would mean I would start at 8am, have half an hour for my lunch and finish at 5pm, 4 days and finish at 4.30pm on a Friday.*

*Gemma: Why is it important to have these 9 day fortnights or these 4 day weeks?*

*Michala: I mean its nice to work 4 days then have 3 off to spend that extra day with my daughter that I should be working but I think I mean 8 till 5.45 is quite a long day and by the time I get home I've got an hour with her and then she goes to bed so there has been the occasion where I've worked normal hours which is 8.30 till 5 and its been really nice just coming home that 45 minutes earlier so I don't know, I'd be quite happy if I got a 9 day fortnight.*

*Gemma: And do you think your career or profession makes it that bit more manageable than other professions?*

*Michala: Yeah. Possibly. Well, its core hours isn't it? I think if I still did residential care work where I did sleepovers, I don't think I could do that job with a child. I don't think I could. I'd be away over night.*

In the excerpt, Michaela discusses flexibility in her paid work by talking about the complexity of flexible working policy. The excerpt illuminates the interrelationship between working and caring discourses (which I discuss latterly in the thesis). She details the annual review of her request for compressed hours over four working days. Using extreme case formulations she describes how she, *'fought for it really and they agreed it'*. Her use of repetition reinforces her point that her employer *'don't like you doing a 4 day week'*. She reinforces this with a clarification that she means her service manager who was involved in the decision making process of flexible working. This extended excerpt highlights the nuances of Michala's intricate flexible working arrangements and she uses discourse practices to talk about her experience of flexible working as fraught with challenges. For instance, to increase her likelihood of receiving some form of compressed working she offers her manager a compromise of working a compressed working fortnight (she describes this as a *'9 day fortnight'*).

Michala says, *'I mean its nice to work 4 days then have 3 off to spend that extra day with my daughter that I should be working'*. Interestingly she identifies the day she does not work as, *'I should be working'*. Thus drawing on the normative Monday to Friday, five days a week normalised working practices of an idealised worker (Lewis and Cooper, 2005). Michala's talk shares similar experiences to the other full-time workers in this thesis. Full-time working often means having limited time after work with your children before they go to bed based on the normative timings of arriving home from work based on normalised working days within the UK. The Third Work Life Balance Survey of employers (Hooker, Neathey, Casebourne and Munro, 2006) found that 38 per cent of employers reported that flexible working had a positive effect on absenteeism and 42 per cent reported that it had a positive effect on labour turnover including retention of female staff. However, throughout this excerpt Michala uses discourse devices such as *'I don't think'* to talk about the challenges she faces in requesting flexible working from her service manager. This concurs with findings by O'Brien (2005) who suggests that, the right to request flexible working is not straightforward. The Flexible Working Taskforce (2009) was tasked with encouraging more employers to see the benefit

to businesses in enabling flexible working amongst its employees. When I ask Michala, *'do you think your career or profession makes it (flexible working) that bit more manageable than other professions?* She answers *'Yeah. Possibly. Well its (present job) core hours isn't it? I think if I still did residential care work where I did sleepovers, I don't think I could do that job with a child. I don't think I could. I'd be away overnight'* Michala is drawing on working discourses which construct normative working practices based on the concept of *'core hours'*, which she identifies as 8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday. Framing this within UK flexible working policy, it is important to draw a distinction between policy discourse and how this is experienced in practice by the participants. For instance in the excerpt below Allana gives an example of requesting flexible working.

*'I work part time. I do 3 days a week, in a block and then have 2 days off with my daughter and then the weekend. I originally asked about flexible working, originally to do 4 days a week and I wasn't allowed to. I suppose I feel a bit hard done by.'* (Allana, Part-time professional service worker)

Here Allana discusses work fitting in with childcare. She uses repetition of *'originally'* to infer that she had to revisit her original plan as her negotiations with her employer were unsuccessful in her securing the part-time working arrangement she had wanted. She talks about *'work is quite challenging'* describing, *'feeling hard done by'* because, *'I originally asked about flexible working to do 4 days a week and I wasn't allowed to.'*

As I have stated in chapter two, the right to request flexible working was developed as part of UK work-family reconciliation policy in early twenty-first century. The Work and Parents Taskforce (2001) recommended it for carers and working parents with children aged up to six. These regulations were enforced in 2003. However the instigation of a flexible working taskforce by Yvette Cooper, the then Secretary of State for the Department for Work and Pensions, made recommendations to improve the availability and quality of family-friendly working practices – focusing on working hours and patterns in line with legislative changes. One of the main government concerns was that although individuals had the right to request flexible working practices, business did not have to accept an individual's request without a strong business case. The Flexible Working Taskforce (2009) found that employers report efficiency savings from the

introduction of flexibility within work-family reconciliation policy. Research by Gambles et al (2006) on *The Myth of Work-Life Balance* found that evidence from seven diverse countries highlighted that there were many, often unfounded, business case fears associated with the adoption of a more flexible working environment. I now turn to excerpts which evidence the challenges around flexible working, in terms of part-time working.

## 6.9 Part-time working

A family which has one full-time worker and one part-time worker has been characterised in work-family literature as a 1.5 worker family. Both Lynne Prince Cooke's (2011) (study of comparative Luxembourg income data<sup>64</sup>) and, Sayer and Gornick's (2012) time use data on working families across UK, France and USA, found Britain's work-family arrangements are characteristically 1.5 worker families<sup>65</sup>. Prior to having children, all the women I interviewed worked full-time. After having children, all mothers went back to work, seven part-time and two full-time. Once the men had become fathers, all except Jake (Michala's partner) returned to full-time working positions.

As I have considered in chapter two, recent statistics from the Office National Statistics (2011) reveal a decrease in the employment rate gap between women who were mothers compared to those who weren't (decreased from 5.8 percent in 1996 to 0.8 percent in 2010). With 67.3 percent of women without children in paid work compared to 66.5 percent of mothers in work by the end of 2010 (ibid). This identifies paid employment as an economic reality for the vast majority of mothers in twenty-first century Britain. In addition, although (at the time of writing this in 2012) mothers have up to twelve months maternity leave (as is now in legal

---

<sup>64</sup> The Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) harmonizes information from a number of national labour force surveys and other sources of employment-related data. For more information, see <http://www.lisproject.org>. Prince Cooke used data from wave 5.2 of LIS to compare relative gender employment equality across the regions circa 2000. Only respondents aged 20 to 54 are included, to focus on prime working-age adults.

<sup>65</sup> 1.5 worker families is distinguished from dual earner families to indicate one part-time and one full-time worker as opposed to dual earners in which both partners could work full-time or part-time.



statute), more mothers are returning to work, either part-time or full-time than ever before. Chambers (2012) argues that, mothers are, more than ever before, focused on providing for their child's needs through earning money to pay for consumables. Thomson et al's (2011) study of *Making Modern Mothers* notes that, material objects such as nappies and prams were often deemed by first-time mothers, their partners and relatives as central to the identity project of motherhood. Their research found all participants talked about the importance of mothers and fathers providing for their child's needs through earning money in paid work (ibid).

In the following excerpt Debbie (a part-time legal services professional) draws on discourses of working and caring to describe herself as a working mother, differentiating between her own arrangements (as a part-time worker) and those other mothers who work full-time or do not work at all.

*Debbie: It's like some of the mums they're not scally [deviant] but mumsy mums who don't work, got a lot of kids. Whereas me I'm a working mum and it's hard yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I definitely do think it's good to be a working mum. It's like there's extreme situations. You've got your full time mum, very mumsy, who doesn't want to work or 'Oh I can't work' and very child orientated and you've got me in the middle who in a way if I gave me job up we'd be struggling with Stan's wages alone. We'd probably cope but we'd be struggling once the bills had come out, Stan's like 'I'd say we'd be struggling', he says 'you pay the mortgage' so yeah I contribute to the family. So part time, the kids have still got me and have to go to nursery. And then you've got the other end of the scale, mums who go back full time and work full time, which I personally couldn't do but I admire them. I think it must be hard on the mum and I just think how do you cope? I've got a friend who does that. And then another friend who does it and her child is in nursery 5 days. I mean, how? It must be think get home, 'Hi, here's your tea, am knackered, bath, bed' Plus she brings work home. And at weekend it's like you wanting to do as much with the kid. I don't know how they do it? But I'm happy sitting in the middle bit, part time, not a full career. I mean the mums we know work full-time, nothing against them, but, I just don't think I could do it. I think I'd be miserable." (Debbie, part-time legal services professional)*

Whilst there is much to analyse in this excerpt, here, I consider how, Debbie's uses discourse practices to talk about differences between working full-time, part-time and stay-at-home mothers. Similarly to other interviewees, she asserts that being a working mum is 'good' and uses repetition, 'Yeah. Yeah. I definitely do

*think it's good to be a working mum.*' She describes *'there's extreme situations'*, using imagery of a continuum with full-time mothers opposed to non-working mothers *'mumsy mums'*. (She also differentiates non-working mothers who are deviant by referring to them using the derogatory descriptor *'scally'*) As part of her constructed continuum of different mothers she positions herself as *'in the middle'*. In explaining the family's need for her financial contribution she uses active voicing of her husband *'he says' you pay the mortgage*. This reinforces her point that she couldn't give up work because her part-time wage pays the mortgage, *'so yeah I contribute to the family'*. She also adds *'So part time, the kids have still got me'* to suggest that regardless of her paid work she is still available for her children. Interesting she uses the words *'the kids have still got me'* to construct herself as a possession. She follows up this sentence by contrasting her part-time work with what she describes *'And then you've got the other end of the scale, mums who go back full time and work full time, which I personally couldn't do but I admire them.'* Here she uses a scale imagery to contrast full-time working with her own part-time work. In commenting that she *"couldn't do it"* she uses the word *'personally'* to position herself in the discourse whilst disclaiming that she admires full-time working mothers.

Debbie then goes on to qualify this personal opinion by giving examples of her friends who work full-time. She uses detail to consolidate her argument that working full-time reduces time spent with children using listing *'here's your tea, am knackered, bath, bed. Plus she brings work home.'* Here Debbie's talk uses detail of her own and her friend's lives to construct differences in working and caring arrangements based on her knowledge. Working full-time is problematized by Debbie on the basis of being *"hard on the mum and I just think how do you cope?"* Again, Debbie returns to her use of imagery to reinforce her point that part-time working was a happy middle ground *'But I'm happy sitting in the middle bit, part-time, not a full career'*. She supports this with disclaimers suggesting, *'I mean the mums we know work full- time, nothing against them, but, I just don't think I could do it. I think I'd be miserable.'* Thus Debbie uses *'I'* to personalise her statement that she thinks she would be miserable working full-time. Gerson (2004) argues:

The public concern with 'mommy wars', in which employed women and homemaking mothers alike feel criticized, reflects a wider trend toward judging personal choices. (2004: 167)

In Debbie's excerpt she associates full-time work with a career. She positions this in contrast to her own part-time work which she doesn't associate with a career. Debbie's talk does not include any discussion of what she is employed to do at work. Her talk is invested in taking up a caring subject position. In an earlier excerpt from Rick there is also evidence of his association of full-time work with '*climbing a career ladder*'. Dex (2004) suggests that the normalised ideal worker can incorporate notions of career work in which those workers with ambitions work hard to reap money and status rewards. In comparison, part-time work is often associated with lower pay and lower status (Williams, 2010).

Leila's excerpt below explains how becoming a mother and working part-time impacted her.

*I would never earn what my husband is earning now. He works his arse off but I can't put the hours in now I'm part-time for the kids. I have a Masters degree and loads of experience but he doesn't. I'm out of the market and I'm seeing jobs and I'm thinking I'm too frightened to apply for that job. And my husband's saying, "You can do that job. You can do that job". And deep down I'm looking for jobs that are definitely under my ability. And I just think God. The problem is that when you are already in a job they are already flexible and then you can drop down to say, 2 days a week. But finding a job that is just 2 days is impossible. They say its part time, its 4 days, I don't want to, I can't do 4 days, I'd be on my knees. Yeah when you are full time they know you were a good worker, they know you so when you go to 2 days you don't feel shitty because you've done, you've worked you arse off in the past for them. But finding a job for just 2 days. You end up working in The Asda for the nursery because it's accommodating and you can do 6- 10 at night. And a job like mine is more than 2 days as well because you get a case and they think Oh she's not in the office for another week. I'm really struggling and I just don't know what to do honestly. (Leila, part-time professional care worker)*

Here Leila uses a range of discourse practices to emphasise the dilemma of negotiating her part-time working contract. She provides descriptions of the problematic nature of arranging childcare and working a part-time contract that meets her family's needs and her own, '*I can't do 4 days, I'd be on my knees*'. Leila talks about working part-time as part of a discussion about new job opportunities. '*And deep down I'm looking for jobs that are definitely under my*

*ability*'. She uses active voicing of her husband '*And my husband's saying, "You can do that job. You can do that job"*'. Throughout the excerpt she describes that since becoming a mother she has readjusted her working arrangements. Her talk details her qualifications and experience, '*I have a Masters degree and loads of experience*'. By doing this she constructs her argument that she feels less attractive to any potential employer because she wants a specific two day a week part-time contract. She says, '*finding a job that is just 2 days is impossible*.' Using extreme case formulations '*impossible*' she constructs a strong case to support her point that finding a new part-time job for two days a week work in her field of care work is challenging. In this analysis I note the conceptualisation of the motherhood penalty from Budig and England (2001). Based on cross-national income survey data they identified the employment gap of mothers. Namely that, on becoming mothers, women's income decreases partly due to their shift into part-time employment which is often lower paid. According to Williams (2012: 4) women often arrange a 'crazy quilt of childcare'<sup>66</sup> to manage the demands of work and family. I return to this with further examples to extend my point in the next chapter.

## 6.10 Summary

McKie and Callan's (2012) critique of a normalised construction of the nuclear family warns of the disconnect between reality of diverse families in the UK and the 1950s 'cornflake packet' image of the white middle class family with the male breadwinner provider and female homemaker. In this chapter I have considered the construction of paid work outside the home as ordinary within parent's talk. By analysing talk from the participants in the study, I have demonstrated that whilst the enduring notions of this masculinised breadwinner provider is prevalent within participants talk, there is a much more complex arrangement of work and caring within their everyday lives. For instance, I analysed talk about themselves as working parents and other parents, including peers and their own parents.

---

<sup>66</sup> Whilst space precludes a detailed discussion of this, the 'crazy quilt of childcare' women often arrange care which includes involvement of grandparents, friends and neighbours (Williams, 2012: 4).

What counts as care and work practices has been the subject of much interest in recent studies on gender, work and family (Doucet, 2006). The British Household Panel survey has been scrutinised for its broad brush approach to investigating care and work practices (Chambers, 2012). In this chapter I have analysed data which illuminated paid employment as significant to the construction of the working parent. However I have also considered evidence of talk about the challenges posed by traditional gendered caring and working for parents.

Evidence in this chapter suggests that fathers and mothers are posed with a series of challenges when reconciling paid work and informal caring arrangements. I have discursively analysed excerpts of talk which reveal that, whilst parents talk about themselves as workers invariably, in terms of work practices such as part-time working, full-time working, compressed hours; they share accounts of common structural constraints in terms of reconciling work and family. An example of this is the range of excerpts in which parents talk about the challenges of flexible working. For many of the participants, these examples encapsulated the challenges of work-family reconciliation they experience in their everyday lives. In light of the changing working and caring patterns for mothers and fathers, O'Brien (2005) suggests that, flexible working could help meet the growing demands on parents to reconcile work and caring responsibilities. In this chapter I have presented evidence of parent's talking about the challenges of flexible working to both mothers and fathers.

Embedded connections between employment and good parenting have generational prevalence in Britain's norms and practices of work and family (Rowbotham, 2012). Throughout the interviews, talk about unpaid caring as work was clearly absent. For example, in the excerpts, parents describe how caring for children takes an enormous amount of time, effort and resources yet this is not constructed as being work. Instead using discourses of paid work, parent's talk tended to discount caring in contrast to paid employment undertaken outside the home. Reconciling work and family can be difficult when differential values are placed on these separately. If caring for others is not considered work then constructions of work-family reconciliation have the potential to ascribe different values to paid employment and informal care. According to Lister's (1997) foundational feminist study of citizenship, discourses of working centre on notions

of being independent rather than interdependent or dependent. This is fundamentally flawed in that throughout the life course our needs for care change as do our dependence and interdependence on others. The danger for work-family reconciliation policy is that the interests and concerns of those needing or providing care would be excluded without a strategic approach to balance the appreciation of change and difference within society (ibid). Working and parenting constructions are informed by contemporary social, economic and political changes. UK work-family reconciliation policy advocates developments such as flexible working opportunities provided to employees within workplace organisations. Feminist analysis has problematized this based on evidence that women are disproportionately more engaged in unpaid caring than men (OECD, 2010) thus more significant analysis is needed on the relationship between gender, work and care on interlinking levels of the individual, the workplace organisation and society.

## **Chapter Seven: Cancelled childcare and delays at work**

### **7.1 Introduction**

In the interviews, parents often talked about their nuanced caring and working arrangements. The interrelationship between working and caring practices are brought into focus in this chapter using excerpts detailing the parents' complex everyday working and caring arrangements. Here I focus on excerpts in which mothers and fathers talk about specific disruptions to these arrangements. Drawing on interview excerpts from a range of parents, I first concentrate on their talk about incidents when children or care providers have been unexpectedly ill resulting in cancelled or rearranged childcare. In the interview talk, these incidents are constructed as disruptions to caring and working arrangements. I move on in the chapter to consider talk about how being delayed at work is also constructed as disruption to caring and working arrangements. Analysing the discourse practices enabled me to focus on the ways in which the parents talked about orchestrating their caring and working practices.

Synchronising working and caring was a prevalent topic in the interview talk. In particular, the participants often talked of the preciousness of time, using discourse practices to speak about how they co-ordinated their working and caring practices. I attend to this later in the chapter by recognising the fact that the interviewees kindly gave up some of their time to participate in the research. Thus in line with the reflexive nature of the thesis I ruminate on the disruption to parent's time caused by participating in the study. In doing so, I recognise that in this type of research some parents may have been interested in the study but did not participate due to time constraints and associated practicalities. I suggest that by recognising the complex research relationship between the participants and myself, the researcher, I gained an insight into how working parents, including myself, manage the complex social phenomenon of working and caring as a parent in twenty-first century Britain. I conclude this chapter by discussing the interrelationship between the individual strategies parents adopted to manage

these disruptions and the structural features of work and family as institutions within society.

## 7.2 Unexpected illness and cancelled childcare

In the following excerpts discourses of working and caring are enmeshed. During the interviews, parents discussed occasions when they had to leave work early or be absent from work because their child or childcare provider was ill.

*Chloe: My son has a cold so its messed up my normal routine at work.*

*Brad: Our daughter was a sickly baby, it caused havoc with work.*

*Tiffany: When my child minder is sick, it's stressful rearranging work at short notice.*

In all these excerpts a sick child or a sick child minder is described as disrupting paid work. The parents use emotive words such as '*havoc*', '*messed up*' and '*stressful*' to convey their feelings about the challenges they faced in rearranging working and caring plans which were often already complex. Williams (2010) eloquently likens work-family reconciliation to a patchwork quilt because the imagery depicts the intricacy and complexity of arrangements for working parents. Significantly as Tiffany states, the '*short notice*' aspect of sickness resulted in parents often not knowing or being able to plan for these disruptions. Blair-Loy (2001: 689) argues that work and family are avaricious institutions 'which are particularly gripping models that orientate us towards where we devote out time energy and passion'. In the interview talk I noted that, rearranging engagement in both of these 'greedy' institutions became increasingly complex due to the 'short notice' nature of sickness the parent's described. As Gloria's excerpt below notes, whilst parents have advance notice from care providers not to send a sick child to nursery, parents do not know when it will occur.

*Gloria: There's times when Joe has sickness and diahorrea. That's against nursery policy to send them so we dread it happening because how do you plan for it? It disrupts everything at work too.*

For many parents, the unknown nature of when sickness might occur is stressful and disrupts work and care arrangements already in place. In many of the



interviews parents talked about their contingency plans for such occasions when they had to leave work early to care for a sick child. In the excerpt below Rick answers my question about leaving work early if his daughter was sick.

*Gemma: If your child was sick and you had to go (leave work), could you?*

*Rick: I think they probably would. There's girls in the office. Like we'll have a secretary between four of us and she does it all the time. I mean, I said the other day, I needed to go because I needed to pick her [his daughter] up because my mum was sick so couldn't and my boss said 'look just go'. Again this is really sad thing to say but in sales if you're bringing in figures and doing really well and you say I need to go early then your boss doesn't care. But when you are not doing well, that's probably when they are going to go 'No'*

In this excerpt Rick answers tentatively that *'they'*, referring to his employers, *'probably would'* allow him to leave work if his child was sick. Using *'probably'* provides a tentative reply to my question. It points to his uncertainty as to whether his employer would enable him to leave work if his daughter was sick. To contradict this he goes on to give an example of when this actually happened, *'the other day I needed go because I needed to pick her up because my mum was sick so couldn't and my boss said "look just go"'*. In terms of discourse practices, Rick uses discursive practices to counter his earlier tentative answer, *'probably'*. Rick adds *'There's girls in the office. Like we'll have a secretary between 4 of us and she does it all the time.'* Here he positions the *'girls'<sup>67</sup> in the office'* in opposition to himself. *'Girls'* is used to construct the women as childlike undermining them as adult women whilst othering them (Butler, 1990). He uses an extreme case formulation *'all the time'* to suggest a secretary often leaves early. He doesn't explicitly state he does it infrequently but his talk constructs this message by positioning himself as different to the secretary who leaves early *'all the time'*. He uses his boss's active voicing *'look just go'* to add weight to his claim that he needed convincing to go as if to validate his worker position. Framing this within Potter's (1996) discourse practice of stake management, Rick uses a disclaimer to follow up his point. *'Again this is really sad thing to say but in sales if you're*

---

<sup>67</sup> Rick is using girls to refer to women. There is a substantial body of scholarship which suggests that the construction of women as girls acts to undermine women by 'Othering' them as childlike. (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001: Butler, 1990)

*bringing in figures and doing really well...* Here, Rick positions achievement of *'doing really well'* within discourses of working. Rick talks about how his employer's agreement to let Rick leave work to care for his child is contingent on Rick's success as a worker. Thus, in this excerpt Rick talks about managing one's stake in the worker identity whilst presenting himself as a caring father simultaneously (Edwards, 2007). This is an example of caring discourses and working discourses overlapping. The complex social phenomenon of working parents' lives emerges here in Rick's excerpt.

Following on from Rick's excerpt, Allana's excerpt illuminates a comparison between her own and her partner's workplace arrangements for parents taking time off sick to care children.

Allana: *[H]is work place are actually less flexible than mine. When my daughter has been sick, which must have happened two or three days since I've been back at work in the last year. I have had time off in my job and I haven't had to pay it back or anything whereas if he's had time off he's had to pay back the hours and usually not very convenient times you know convenient to them and not to us and what can you do when your daughter can't go to nursery?*

Here the interrelationship of caring and working emerge with Allana's talk about how (in)flexible her and her partner's workplaces are when their child is sick. Allana repeats the word *'convenient'* to emphasise her partner must *'pay back'* time off to care for their child. In other words, *'convenient'* is a time chosen by the employer to fit organisational needs. For Allana this is problematic. Convenient is not associated with the unexpectedness of illness and Allana poses a rhetorical question *'what can you do when your daughter can't go to nursery?'* By posing the question she is discursively including me, as the researcher, into this problematizing. Using a range of discourse practices including, *'you know'* and asking, *'what can you do when your daughter can't go to nursery?'* she discursively constructs a corroboration of consensus (Potter and Wetherell, 1987), appealing to my understanding that organising work and caring arrangements can be challenging when a child becomes sick. Allana's talk constructs her partner's organisation as lacking flexibility. Emslie and Hunt's (2009) research on gender, work and care found that, men and women are more likely to perceive work-life balance as a personal issue resolved through individual strategies and not as a

structural problem caused by lack of flexibility in the workplace. In Allana's interview she suggests that, lack of flexibility needs to be addressed. In doing so she talks about her individual strategies to work-family reconciliation when her child is sick. A large scale research report written by Joan C. Williams for The Center for Work-Life Law Report (2006) found that many American parents felt they were, *One sick child away from being fired*. On reviewing these findings (ibid) Williams (2010) argued that both mothers and fathers with sick children felt 'America's lack of child care and social services, along with job inflexibility, creates a toxic mixture that threatens the jobs of fathers as well as mothers.' (2010: 42) Across the Atlantic Ocean, British parents do have statutory flexible working rights unlike to their American counterparts. However, in the UK, The Institute of Public Policy Research (2012) notes, these are problematic with structural constraints such as limited flexibility in the workplace facilitating unequal divisions of childcare and employment responsibilities between men and women. According to IPPR (ibid), flexible working policy has translated outdated expectations amongst employers that when a child is sick, a mother, rather than a father, will need to take time off work.

Following on from Allana's excerpt, Sarah and Neil both talk about differentiated experiences of taking time off work to care for their daughter Jade when sick. In these excerpts the intersections between working and caring emerges as they described the complexity of working parent's lives. As Willig (2012) suggests, what is not said is as important as what is said in talk, as the following excerpt reveals. Thus I interpret the following excerpts as talk about 'mother as primary carer' and 'father as breadwinner' despite the words not actually being uttered or necessarily accepted without question by the participants.

*Sarah: You see I think there are different expectations. With us both being in management as well you used to occasionally get, men who would ring up and say 'Oh I've got to stay home today my kid is sick' and my male manager would say 'well where's his mum?' That's why I stay home when Jade is sick.*

*Neil: My female manager said that to me last week. She said 'you need to choose between your job and Sarah's career. If your kid is sick, let Sarah take time off work not you'. So I do.*

In Ellison et al's (2009) study *Work and care: a study of modern parents*, they note that, egalitarianism is embedded in ideals of parenting rather than lived experiences. Sarah and John's excerpts present talk about these lived experiences with Sarah being positioned in both excerpts as the primary carer. In their Scottish based qualitative study of twenty three individuals in mid-life (50 - 52 years) Emslie and Hunt (2009) found evidence that parents recognised the importance of egalitarianism in gender relations however gendered inequalities in caring and working extended over a longer period of women's than men's lives. Sarah talks about '*different expectations*' to refer to herself and John as a working mother and a working father. First, she refers to them as a collective '*us*' (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006) with shared employment positions '*both being in management*'. Both Sarah and John use active voicing (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998) to recount examples of lived experiences of working in management. These construct corroboration in Sarah's statement of the 'different expectations' of mothers and fathers when a sick child needs care. John's excerpt functions to corroborate Sarah's statement about '*different expectations*' by active voicing his manager's words '*She said, you need to choose between your job and Sarah's career. If your kid is sick, let Sarah take time off work not you*'. Active voicing is used to bring their experiences to life by adding authenticity (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998).

In both excerpts, Sarah and John use the descriptors '*male manager*' and '*female manager*' to specify the gender of the managers they are referring to. This is striking in its obvious recognition of gender as a feature of their lived experiences as a working mother and working father. Their talk describes separate experiences where both a female and a male manager have spoken to them about the expectations on women rather than men to care for sick children. Gerson (2004) argues that, despite increased numbers of women in employment, at all levels of employment (including management), gender differences are institutionalised. For Emslie and Hunt (2009: 15) 'Many contemporary studies of 'work-life balance' either ignore gender or take it for granted'. However, clearly Sarah and John's excerpts reveal their own thoughts about the place of gender in their work-family dilemmas and conflicts. Using active voicing they authenticate their experiences of arranging care for their child when she is sick. In analysing both Sarah and John's talk, it appears that there is an embedded resignation.

Their excerpts present limited talk about examples of challenging these '*different expectations*' or challenging the managers whose talk genders Sarah and John's caring and working arrangements. In following Gerson's (2004) recognition of the significance of gender in work and family arrangements, I argue that it is important to contextualise Sarah and John's experiences within the wider social context. Sarah and John's talk lacks discussion about how they challenged their manager's gendering. Williams (2010) describes workers' lack of challenge to workplace gendering in these circumstances as commonplace because workers are worried they may be fired. Both Gerson (2004) and Williams (2010) advocate developing understanding of the larger social contexts of personal choices and strategies rather than passing judgment on individuals. I would argue that, given the social, economic and political landscape I reviewed in chapter two, individuals and families such as Sarah and John, may choose not to challenge employers due to job insecurity and financial instability in the austere times which the research is contextualised.

Rather than oversimplifying this analysis by suggesting their talk simply reveals their personal choices, I concur with Gerson (2004) and Williams (2010) that Sarah and John's choices are rooted in enduring gendered institutions of paid work and unpaid caring. The excerpts reveal how Sarah and John use active voicing to suggest their choices are based on their managers' words and their talk constructs employers by positioning them as decision making agents. In John's excerpt there is a reference to Sarah's career and he talks of this as opposed to John's job. Career woman is a particular constructed version of the worker identity (Blair-Loy, 2001). Within present UK work-family policy, working mothers must simultaneously take up the subject position of carer and worker. As I have made clear in chapter three, the career women construct is not simplistically associated with all working women (Lawthorn, 1999). Instead it has been historically located in notions of the middle class professional<sup>68</sup> working women. Although in recent

---

<sup>68</sup> As I made clear in chapter three, throughout this thesis, I mobilise professional to mean someone who has completed formal education and training for membership of the profession and its particular knowledge and skills necessary to perform the role of that profession. Most professionals are subject to codes of conduct enshrining rigorous ethical and moral obligations. Professional standards of practice and ethics for a particular field are typically agreed upon and maintained through widely recognized

decades there has been a steady increase in working mothers, the career women construct continues to be associated with selfishness which conflicts with notions of the selflessness embedded in essentialist notions of women and mothering discourses (Thomson et al, 2011). Considering the excerpt above, Sarah is described as pursuing a career, historically constructed as incompatible with the caring mother construct. Being a working mother in contemporary society incorporates notions of contributing to the family wage and society's economic wellbeing. However mothers who have careers rather than jobs can be deemed as going too far, being too selfish (Gatrell, 2005). As the excerpt above illuminates:

Women are caught in the stresses and strains in achieving a new identity, especially as they are caught between the wish to have a family and the wish to have a career (Giddens, 2005 cited in Reynolds, 2008: 10).

As I have previously identified, Debbie problematizes mothers who have '*careers and work full-time*'. In her talk she uses imagery to reinforce her point that part-time working is a happy middle ground, '*But I'm happy sitting in the middle bit, part time, not a full career*'. She supports this with disclaimers suggesting, '*I mean the mums we know work full time, nothing against them, but I just don't think I could do it. I think I'd be miserable*.' By using '*I*' Debbie personalises her statement that she thinks she would be miserable working full-time. Similarly to earlier second wave feminists, Gerson (2004) argues that both employed mothers and homemaking mothers are criticised in Anglo-American societies. She advocates moving away from this wider trend of judging the personal choices of women to consider the significance of structural constraints which unfairly restrict the choices of mothers (ibid).

Both Raddon (2002) and Pillay (2007) explored the experiences of mothers working in UK academia. They found that the professional working mothers in their studies were considered outside the norms of the good mother construct because they are perceived as selfish for seeking professional and personal development in their careers. I argue this construction of the selfish professional

---

professional associations. I recognise that in some cultures, the term is linked to particular social stratum. (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003)

working mother is problematic as the excerpt from Michala (a full-time social worker) illuminates. Michala is a full-time professional working woman who talks about taking time off work to care for her sick child whilst her partner works part-time.

*Michala: Yeah I was off on Monday because my child was ill. And I could have took that day as leave, toil, unpaid leave or made me hours up and I made me hours up.*

In this excerpt Michaela uses listing, a discourse practice, to explain the choices available to her. '*I could have took that day as leave, toil, unpaid leave or made me hours up*'. Her list adds detail to her talk about how she reconciles work and family obligations when her child is sick. In analysing this data, I do not get a sense of any perceived selfishness often associated with the professional working career women construct I discussed above. Michala talks about choosing to 'make up' her hours and, drawing on flexible working discourse, constructs her working practices as flexible on the basis of these choices. She does not explicitly detail how and when she would need to make up her hours. According to OECD findings (2011), making up hours when working full-time is likely to involve sacrificing time elsewhere. This could mean working earlier in the morning, later in the evening or during the weekend. Whilst her talk communicates her professional training and the nature of Michala's employment, it is my interpretation that to deem these as conducive to a construction of a selfish, professional working mother seems too simplistic. In fact, Michala's talk about rearranging working and caring because her child was sick would result in less time for herself and more extended working hours and intensive caring thus contradicting the selfish professional working mother construct.

In the reflexive spirit of this thesis, I feel it is important I recognise the research relationships I developed by meeting and spending time interviewing Michala and all other participants. Coffey (1999) notes that the complex researcher / researched relationship is given insufficient attention in research. (See Yarwood, 2013 for my detailed discussion of this study, my reflexivity and the researcher relationships.) Using the concept of reflexivity<sup>69</sup>, I locate myself in relation to my

---

<sup>69</sup> Reflexivity broadly defined as, reflecting on and understanding our own personal, political and intellectual biographies as researchers (Doucet, 2006)

research participants. Whilst I discuss this in detail elsewhere in the thesis, in light of my analysis of Michala's<sup>70</sup> excerpt above and the constructions of working career mother, I acknowledge my critical role in creating, interpreting, and theorizing this research data (Doucet, 2006). As such, I found Michala's reconciliation of work and family impressive. As I had become a first-time mother working full-time in academia during the research process I marvelled at Michala's ability to manage complex family and working schedules. As I discuss in other parts of this thesis (particularly chapters four and eight) my own identity changed throughout the thesis. Namely, at the beginning of the research I was working as a full-time academic researcher based in the UK. I was in my mid-thirties, in a heterosexual relationship with no children. Significantly, after the research was already underway, I became pregnant with my first child. On having my baby, I returned to work full-time after maternity leave. Therefore I recognise both sameness and difference when unpicking the complexity of my relationship with Michala and the other participants (Gabb, 2011). For instance becoming a full-time working mother myself enabled me to see the differences and similarities in how I organised my work-family arrangements compared to my participants.

Like Michala, I was a full-time working mother and experiencing disruptions when my child was sick. I did not think I was selfish to work full-time, in fact I often felt I prioritised both my paid work and family commitments before my own wellbeing. However I feel it important to render these values visible to contextualise the decisions I made throughout the research including my analysis of the selfish career women construct prevalent in interview talk (see excerpts above). In this sense I interpreted Michala's skills at arranging complex work and care arrangements as responding to what she described as disruptions to her usual schedule. For me, Michala was not selfish as a full-time professional working mother. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) suggest that, qualitative research is a situated activity open to interpretations. I am arguing that my interpretation of Michala in this way is an example of the many complex series of decisions researchers, like myself, make throughout the research process (Mauthner et al, 2008). I discuss

---

<sup>70</sup> I would suggest that on reflection my relationship with Michala had no unique features which made it stand it from my relationships with the other participants.



this further in the forthcoming chapter, turning now to another disruption parents talked about in terms of work-family reconciliation.

### 7.3 Being delayed at work

Parents talked about being delayed at work as a disruption impacting their already complex everyday working and caring arrangements. The following excerpt is from Michala.

*Michala: There have been times when I have been home late about 30mins and I've had to ring my mum. There was one occasion when I had to go to Old Town because of a child protection case and I was out until 11.30 at night and had to ring Jake up at work and ask could he get to finish work to go and pick Libby up and bring her home but he couldn't so then I had to ring my mum and ask did she mind it if she could bring her home and put her to bed and stay with her until Jake gets home at 9 which she said was fine. So I felt really bad about that. So I got home at 11.30 and was going take the time back to see Libby in the morning but I had to be in Old Town again for 9 so I had to leave here at 7.15am so I think I went 2 days without seeing her and it weren't nice really" (Michala, full-time care professional)*

In this excerpt Michala uses detail (Potter, 1996; Edwards, 2007) to talk about the unplanned changes to her daily schedule because she is delayed at work. Working a longer day meant Michala did not see her daughter, Libby, before she went to bed or when she got up in the morning. Michala expresses her unhappiness about this, using detail to build a plausible and authentic account of strategies she used to manage both her work demands and her family commitments. Using extreme case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986), Michala expresses that '*So I felt really bad about that*'. She also reinforces this by saying '*it weren't nice really*'. In terms of stake management (Edwards, 2007), Michala discursively discounts claims that she choose to work rather than care for her child. As part of this, using detail, she constructs the dilemma she felt when she was delayed at work so couldn't see her daughter before she went to bed. She draws on wider discourses of caring which position women's responsibility as a mother to put her child's needs first. This intersects in the excerpt with discourses of working which draw on social norms of reliability, presenteeism and conscientiousness (Edwards and Wacjman, 2005). Thus Michala's talk uses

discourse practices to justify and rationalise her decisions to stay at work and find alternative childcare. For Michaela, talking about being a working mother produced an account in which she tried to maintain and preserve her interests as a good mother without making an explicit statement about this in the account. Her disclaimer that she is working on a child protection case draws together discourse resources and discourse practices, giving a sense of the specific challenges she faced in being a working mother with responsibility to protect children as her duty of care in her professional working capacity.

As I have stated in chapter three and also, in chapter six (with reference to Debbie), the career women construct associated with professional full-time working mothers, such as Michala, incorporates perceived notions of selfishness (Raddon, 2002; Pillay, 2009;). Whilst full-time work is given kudos within the masculinised notion of breadwinner, it is deemed selfish when associated with the professional career mother. Careers are associated with full-time not part-time work (Cahusac and Kanji, 2013). Furthermore, careers are constructed as incompatible with mothering (Edwards and Wajcman, 2005; Cahusac and Kanji, 2013).

In the following excerpts, Tiffany, Rick and Leila describe career women in the past tense.

*Tiffany: I used to have money, my career, now I don't have either but I'm a mum and work part-time*

*Rick: My ex-partner used to earn a six figure salary, she was a career women. It's not right to do full-time once you are a mother. Our daughter's needs come first now.*

*Leila: I used to focus on me. I was a career women but I have put my kids first, cutting down to part-time work. I leave it to my husband now.*

Tiffany, Rick and Leila use the past tense, '*I used to earn*' and '*was a career women*' to distinguish identity change between non-mother to mother. In this sense, they construct careers as left behind in the past once women become mothers. In these excerpts, the talk makes visible the notion that mothering and career ambitions are incompatible, somewhat selfish, '*I was a career women but I have put my kids first cutting down to part-time work*'. Full-time work for mothers is described as "*It's not right to do full-time once you are a mother. Our daughter's*

*needs come first now”* Interestingly, in Michala’s excerpt above, she gives little or no evidence of this perceived notion of selfishness despite being a full-time professional working mother. She talks about both her daughter’s needs and her employer’s needs, mentioning herself only to express her unhappiness with her family’s complex work-care arrangements. This contradicts notions of selfishness associated with personal pleasure and fulfilling one’s own needs as Leila describes *‘I used to focus on me. I was a career women but I have put my kids first cutting down to part-time work.*

Ivy, the second full-time working mother I interviewed stated:

*Ivy: I work full-time and I’m a mum. I’m always thinking about how I can juggle them both. When I’m delayed at work, I drive like a maniac, dangerously fast to the nursery. To see your son the last one there, staring out of the window waiting for you is really terrible.”(Ivy, full-time professional communications officer).*

Here Ivy describes her son being the last child in the nursery when Ivy arrives to pick him up. Ivy uses extreme case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986) *‘I drive like a maniac, dangerously fast’, and, ‘really terrible’* to emphasise the strategies she uses to minimise disruption to her son’s care by Ivy being delayed at work. Again this excerpt constructs an image of the implicit intersection of care and work practices. These intersections of caring and working practices are described as problematic and, like Michala, Ivy talks about the complexity of reconciling paid work and family as *‘really terrible’*. Discursive detail is used to construct a plausible and authentic account (Potter, 1996) of Ivy’s individual strategies to manage both her work demands and her family commitments. These do not appear to be easy strategies to manage as her talk positions the intersections of caring and working as jarring rather than smooth in her transition from work to the nursery. Drawing on Edwards (2007) and Potter (1996) stake management Ivy’s discourse practices construct an account in which she positions herself as accountable for her son being the last child to be collected from nursery. Furthermore Ivy’s talk gives a sense of confession about driving dangerously fast. This suggests that, far from the selfish career women construct sometimes associated with full-time working professional women, Ivy puts her own life at risk (driving dangerously) for the sake of her child when she is delayed at work.

Whilst the breadwinner father and the caregiver mother have historically been positioned in binary opposition within the constructed spheres of public and private, the full-time working mother construct problematizes this reductionist opposition (Gatrell, 2005). Specifically, the full-time working mother cannot be simplistically positioned in either of the constructed, historically enduring and widely critiqued spheres of the public and the private (ibid). As caring and working have been historically, socially and culturally constructed within different sets of social norms, mothers working full-time often experience significant challenges in reconciling the 'greedy institutions' of family and work (Blair-Loy, 2001). According to Edwards and Wacjman (2005) the hierarchical construction of a career is associated with norms of promotion and progress contextualised within men's life course. Women's careers are considered interrupted during childrearing years thus having a career whilst being a mother has historically been outside social norms (ibid).

Contemporary evidence suggests a cultural gender shift with increased participation of men in caring and women in work (ibid) however the male breadwinner and female carer binaries remain prevalent (Dex, 2004). For instance The British Social Attitudes survey (2012) found a fall in the proportion of workers who regard men as priority breadwinners, yet detected no accompanying drop, at least among women, in the proportion who believe that a woman should be prepared to reduce their paid work for the sake of her family. This can be interpreted as an intensification of women's dual burden as both economic providers and caregivers. This dual burden appears evident when Michala says *'I had to ring Jake up at work and ask could he get to finish work to go and pick Libby up and bring her home but he couldn't.'* Whilst being delayed at work disrupts her family's complex work and care arrangements, the excerpt suggests it is full-time care professional Michala who organises alternative care arrangements and not her partner, part-time public service worker Jake. Michala says, Jake could not finish work early to pick up their son but does not explain or give reasons why Jake couldn't do this. It is Michala's mother who provides care in the interim and not Jake. Thus the caring responsibility passes generationally from one woman to another as Michala talks about her dual burden of responsibility to her work and her child. According to Fox (2001) gender divisions are reproduced

when maternal grandmothers rather than fathers regularly provide additional support to mothers by stepping into primary caregiving roles when needed during times of disruption.

As I have stated, Michala is a full-time care professional. Jake, her partner, is a part-time service sector worker. A family which has one full-time worker and one part-time worker has been characterised in work-family literature as a 1.5 worker family<sup>71</sup> (Sayer and Gornick, 2012). In quantitative studies into comparative Luxemburg income data<sup>72</sup> and time use data on working families across UK, France and USA, both Lynne Prince Cooke (2011) and Sayer and Gornick (2012) found Britain's work-family arrangements are characteristically 1.5 worker families. Medved and Rawlins (2011) characterises Jake and Michala's work-family reconciliation arrangements as non-traditional. This non-traditional construct is defined as reversing the orthodox part-time female worker and full-time male breadwinner family form prevalent in the UK. This reversal has been the focus of recent research in response to statistical trends evidencing men and women's changing participation in care and work. Dermott (2008) disputes suggestions that significant numbers of fathers are participating in part-time and reduced hour employment often associated with a 'female model' of work-family reconciliation. According to Hodges and Budig (2010) women still unfairly carry the burden of caring regardless of the reversal of part-time and full-time working arrangements between many couples. O'Brien (2005) notes that caring and working practices differ between individual men and women, therefore, making any broad brush generalisation of the caring and working arrangements of a 1.5 worker family is over-simplistic. With this in mind I now extend my analysis by turning to examine Jake's account about the same incident in which Michala was delayed at work. In the following excerpt, Jake talks about being unable to leave his work early when Michala rings him because she is delayed at her work.

---

<sup>71</sup> 1.5 worker families is distinguished from dual earner families to indicate one part-time and one full-time worker as opposed to dual earners in which both partners could work full-time or part-time.

<sup>72</sup> The Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) harmonizes information from a number of national labour force surveys and other sources of employment-related data For more information, see <http://www.lisproject.org>. Prince Cooke used data from wave 5.2 of LIS to compare relative gender employment equality across the regions circa 2000. Only respondents aged 20 to 54 are included, to focus on prime working-age adults.

*Jake: She's the breadwinner in the family, Yeah work's really important to me, you know, I have to go to work like Michala. There was this time when she was delayed at work and she has rang me to leave work but I still had to work. I can't leave, you know.*

Unlike Michala, Jake does not detail any attempts he made to negotiate with his employer for him to leave work earlier. When he describes Michala ringing him at work asking him to finish before his shift is over Jake says, he '*can't leave*'. His talk infers that workplace restrictions are in place to stop him doing so. He does not give details of the reasons why he cannot leave work. Neither does he provide evidence of what might happen if he did leave work early. He does, however, use extreme formulations (Pomerantz, 1986) to emphasize his point that "*Yeah work's really important to me*". Jake adds '*You know*' to appeal to my sense of collective understanding and agreement (Edwards, 2007) that his reasons for not leaving work early are plausible. Positioning himself in a working discourse he describes himself as a worker '*like Michala*' investing his stake in this discourse (ibid) by minimises any suggestion that work is less important to him than her. In doing so, he expresses his commitment to work whilst also constructing work as restricting his availability to care for his son. The action orientation of this is that he elevates work above care by talking implicitly about the power to restrict his caring availability. In the interview Jake differentiates himself from Michala by describing her, not him, as '*the breadwinner in the family*'. However he also draws on discourses of working to construct himself as a worker whilst differentiating this with Michala using the word '*breadwinner*' for her and not himself. (Later in the interview he qualifies this breadwinner description by differentiating her as a full-time worker and him as a part-time worker.) His talk reveals contradictions in being both '*like Michala*' and different to Michala. He talks of them sharing worker status positioning himself within discourses of working by describing '*having*' to go to work.

Lewis and Giullari (2005) describe an adult worker model embedded within European Union policy directives in the early twenty-first century. They suggest that this was modelled as an alternative to the traditional masculinised breadwinner worker. Unlike the male breadwinner constructed on notions of full-time working, the adult worker model incorporates various modes of working including part-time, flexi-time and compressed hours (ibid). Using this to frame

Jake's talk, we can interpret Jake positioning Michala inside the breadwinner construct. He describes himself as a part-time worker however talks about his paid employment restricting his availability to leave work early to care for his son. He says "*I still had to work. I can't leave, you know*". His talk is playing out what has been described as the adult worker model in which paid work influences the family's care arrangements. (Lewis and Giullari, 2005)

## 7.4 Professional<sup>73</sup> and non-professional paid work

In this chapter I have analysed talk about being delayed at work to consider the tensions of reconciling work and family for the working parents I interviewed. In particular, I have identified excerpts from Michala and Jake. Jake distances himself from the breadwinner construct, framing his family as a dual earner family with Michala described as '*the breadwinner*' (full-time worker) and, himself, as a part-time worker. Analysing both Jake and Michala's talk about the same incident (Michala being delayed at work) they both discuss intersections between caring and working practices. With reference to Giullari and Lewis's (2005) adult worker model, whilst they are both adult workers, Jake presents a complex picture of how they are both workers but different types based on part-time and full-time work. In saying, '*she has rang me to leave work but I still had to work*', he goes on to talk about the differences between Michala's professional and his non-professional employment status. In doing so he constructs professional employment as having more autonomy over decision making and flexible working than his own non-professional work thus rationalising his inability to leave work when she rang him. I would argue this presents an element of contradiction with Michala's earlier excerpt in which she gives an alternative version of not being able to leave work

---

<sup>73</sup> For the purpose of helpfulness, I reiterate that, I made clear in chapter three and elsewhere, that I use professional to mean someone who has completed formal education and training for membership of the profession and its particular knowledge and skills necessary to perform the role of that profession. Most professionals are subject to codes of conduct enshrining rigorous ethical and moral obligations. Professional standards of practice and ethics for a particular field are typically agreed upon and maintained through widely recognized professional associations. I recognise that in some cultures, the term is linked to particular social stratum. (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003)

and ringing Jake because her professional working capacity meant she had a responsibility to protect children as her duty of care. In my view, whilst dual earning occurs in their family as they are both adult workers, my analysis of their discourse practices illuminates a complexity in how they reconcile work and family. Significant to this complexity is the differentiation, both Michala and Jake make, about work which is professional and that which is not. Interestingly, Michala talks about professional work making it difficult for her to reconcile work-family when she on *'a child protection case'* whilst Jake suggests professional work makes it easier to *'be in charge and leave when you can decide'*.

Other parents talked about being delayed at work including Gloria and Tiffany as the following excerpts reveal.

*Gloria: Sometimes meetings at work drag on. I've learnt, since having Joe, to stand up and say I've got to go to pick Joe up from nursery. I can read the minutes of the meeting to catch up. (A part-time service sector professional)*

*Tiffany: I can't just say 'bye' to customers and rush them out because we'd lose their business but it's really stressful because I'm clock watching to really make sure I'm not late collecting my daughter. (A part-time non-professional service sector worker)*

Both Tiffany and Gloria are part-time workers. They talk about the individual strategies they use to avoid the disruption of working late thus arriving late to collect their children from nursery and their child minder. Gloria says she excuses herself during unfinished meetings, *"I've learnt, since having Joe, to stand up and say 'I've got to go to pick Joe up from nursery'"*. She does this using both imagery (describing physically standing up in a meeting) and also active voicing (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998). Tiffany also uses imagery by describing *'clock watching'* to talk about her strategy to avoid being delayed at work. In addition she uses emotive words and extreme case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986) such as *'really stressful'* to convey the sense of challenge being late at work which delays her collecting her son from her formal care provider. When discussing these strategies Gloria, Tiffany and other parents talked about how their occupations provided different opportunities for flexibility in reconciling working and family. For instance, in the excerpt above Gloria (part-time service sector professional) says, *'I can read the minutes of the meeting to catch up.'* In contrast, Tiffany (part-time service



sector worker) says, *'I can't just say bye to customers and rush them out because we'd lose their business'*. In these cases whilst they both work part-time in the service sector, Gloria, the professional worker says *'I've learnt to stand up and say I've got to go to pick Joe up from nursery'*. In contrast, Tiffany a non-professional service worker says, *'I can't just say bye to customers and rush them out'*. This returns to a point I discussed earlier in preceding chapters that, whilst work and gender is significant to work-family reconciliation, it is important to consider 'the gendered nature of work experiences by all sorts of women in all types of work'. (Lawthom, 1999: 76)

As I have discussed in chapter six, during the interviews, parents talked about differences in the flexibility offered within some fields of work or industries (Cahusac and Kanji, 2013). The notion of flexibility is extended in the excerpts here by parents suggesting a range of strategies available to them to reconcile work and family demands. To some degree, these strategies depend on the extent to which flexibility is embedded within their employment. Ivy (a full-time communications professional) says *'I try to avoid being delayed on something at work, I take work home so I can pick Rylan up.'* Here Ivy uses 'I' a pronoun used to personalise her strategies with 'try' inferring a tentative rather than certainty in her efforts to avoid being delayed. Additionally, some parents described not being able to work from home due to the constraints of their job or their employers. Tiffany (a part-time service worker) states *'If I'm stuck at work I can't take a customer home like those who work in an office because customers come to the shop. Mine's not a desk job with portable paperwork.'* Like Ivy, Tiffany uses 'I' to personalise her strategies. However in contrast, Tiffany's talk is not tentative but certain in her statement *'I can't take a customer home'*. In the excerpt below, Gloria too uses the personal pronoun 'I' to personalise her strategies when describes teaching as having some but not unlimited opportunities for flexibility.

*Gloria: Obviously I don't want to be delayed at work and I can't take my class home and teach them in my lounge. I can take marking home though so I don't get delayed at work. I just do it at night after bedtime.*

Here Gloria talk uses detail to construct a plausible and authentic account (Potter, 1996) when describing not wanting to be delayed at work and working from home as a strategy within her work-family reconciliation arrangements.

In the excerpts from Ivy, Gloria and Tiffany there is evidence of them developing individual strategies based on what they construct as 'can' and 'cannot do' when describing how they manage their caring and working arrangements. Whilst providing insights into individual strategies this data should be contextualised within existing evidence on structural factors influencing individual choices of work-family reconciliation (Emslie and Hunt, 2009). For instance, evidence from Ellison et al (2009) and The Flexible Working Taskforce (2009) state that both the individual employer and the field of employment have an influence over the type of flexibility offered to parents with variations across occupational hierarchy and work sectors. The Fatherhood Institute (2010) suggests that, flexibility is more readily available to both men and women who are professional workers rather than in lower status employment. Cahusac and Kanji (2013) note that, this is an oversimplistic view. Collinson and Hearn (2001) argue that men and women in professional and managerial jobs can be united in their difference to those men and women who work in less well-paid jobs. Whilst some of the professional workers interviewed in this study (including Gloria and Leila) talked of some flexibility in their workplace enabling them to respond to disruptions, this cannot be simplistically explained as a result of being in professional or managerial jobs. For instance whilst Jake (a part-time non-professional service sector worker) talks about lack of flexibility restricting his response to disruptions, Gloria (a part-time service sector professional) and Michala (full-time service sector professional) talk about some flexibility. However as the following example demonstrates, some professionals such as Sarah talked about her managerial position having expectations for her to stay late at work for meetings despite the knock-on effect this would have on Sarah's work-family reconciliation.

*Sarah: Because I was in management you are expected to come in before the workers and stay late, strategy meetings, going to parents evenings, presentation nights and lots of, you know, out of hours that you're expected to. And I did, but that was before having a child. Me saying to my manager 'its 4.30pm, can I get off?' would be like bad, would be met by frowns.*

At the time of being interviewed Sarah was combining part-time administration work and part-time study. In the interview she talked about her previous employment as a full-time professional care manager. In the excerpt above, Sarah says *'in management you are expected to come in before the workers and*

*stay late*'. Here she describes being delayed at work or arriving early in the morning as expected behaviour. Sacks (1992) frames this discourse practice as, doing 'being ordinary'. Sarah uses disclosure and disclaimer saying, '*And I did, but that was before having a child*' to describe how she used to accept being delayed at work but that had changed since she had a child. She lists activities she was expected to attend (Drew et al, 2006). This adds detail and emphasis to the ordinariness of managerial working practices based on working extra hours, '*...strategy meetings, going to parents evenings, presentation nights and lots of, you know out of hours that you re expected to*'. She repeats the use of the word 'expected' to add emphasis and combines this with the extreme case formulation '*lots of*', (Pomerantz, 1986; Edwards, 2007).

Additionally, Sarah says, '*you know*' to appeal to my understanding as she suggests that '*out of hours working*' was ordinary and normalised as '*expected*' within her full-time care management job. She goes on to talk about receiving disapproval from her manager when she asked if you could leave at 4.30pm (the end of her contractual hours for that day) '*Me saying to my manager, 'it's 4.30pm, can I get off?' would be like bad, would be met by frowns*'. Here Sarah uses imagery of a frowning manager to provide detail and present authenticity in her account of constructing the account of challenging norms around expecting workers to work extra hours. Sarah extends this account by using active voicing to depict herself asking her manager if she could leave work at 4.30pm. For Sarah and the other interviewees, timings were often significant in talk about work as they were used by participants to specify their working hours, particularly start and finish times. Parents discussed working hours to suggest that the opportunity for flexibility in working hours often facilitated parent's ability to manage working and caring arrangements effectively. During the interviews, parents talked about professional and non-professional working to construct different versions of the ways in which this influenced their reconciliation of working and caring as I have highlighted throughout this chapter. Whilst I have discussed this elsewhere in the thesis, I will return to it in the forthcoming chapter to present concluding discussions.

## **7.5 Framing the research participation as adding to the complexity of work-family reconciliation**

As I have stated, many of the interviewees talked about their complex work and family arrangements. Often this talk concentrated on the complexity of their scheduled daily routine of working and family activities and the preciousness of time. Being delayed at work or childcare being cancelled were concerns for many of the working parents as it meant that their working and caring schedules were disrupted. Throughout the research process my awareness of the preciousness of parent's time led me to consider the place of this research in taking up their time. My first example of this was during the recruitment process. Some potential participants stated that they were unable to take part in the interviews because they didn't have time to spare. For instance, after interviewing Leila she said her husband (Henry) had agreed I could contact him about arranging a possible interview. However, I found purposive sampling through gatekeepers such as Leila did not guarantee further recruitment because Henry declined to participate due to the limited time he said he had available to be interviewed.

In other cases, some participants agreed to be interviewed on the condition that it 'did not take too long'. Thus despite my interview guide of an hour, in the instance of Stan, Chloe, and Tiffany, these interviews were shorter in duration. As a researcher I was grateful to them for participating and a shortened interview time seemed to allow engagement and data collection whilst not compromising the ethics of respecting the needs of the participant during the research process. Whilst I was aware that an interview of less than one hour would mean less data from some participants, I did not render this to be any less rich data (Mauthner et al, 2008). As I was also intent on ensuring that all those who wanted to participate could, I decided that an hour long interview should be a guide rather than a barrier. I felt the time restrictions limiting how long they could afford me was not necessarily something they could control. In fact, as the study progressed, I got a greater sense of the preciousness of the time participants afforded me as I learnt in the interviews about how demanding caring and working was on their time. I felt appreciative to them for giving up some of this precious time. Furthermore, as a

working mother in the latter stages of this thesis, I also found myself struggling much more to find time whilst working and caring for my baby.

Interestingly, I also found that some of the participants talked for longer than an hour. Again I felt it was ethical to respect the participants by not cutting them off once we reached the guide hour mark. Instead I drew on Denzin and Lincoln's (2008) recommendation that qualitative researchers should manage the research relationship by taking cues from participants in terms of timings and progress during data collection. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) define qualitative research as a situated activity. Drawing on this, I found that throughout the research process, I developed an awareness of the preciousness of time for working parents with complex work-family arrangements. As I have stated elsewhere, my own identity changed when I became a mother during the course of the thesis. As a working mother, I was exposed to the realities of time demands on working parents, that I had not, until then, experienced first-hand. Coffey (1999) recommends qualitative researchers discuss how fieldwork affects the researcher and also the complex relationship with participants. In my own experience I learnt that through the changes to my own personal biography I was able to extend my understanding of parent's work-family reconciliation by placing my own experiences alongside those of my participants. In this sense, I developed an awareness of the research participation being an additional activity which some participants struggled to shoehorn into their already complex work-family schedule.

## **7.6 Summary**

In this chapter I have illuminated the complexities of working parent's lives as they reconcile work and family practices. Emerging from the talk were parents' reference to specific moments of cancelled childcare and being delayed at work. Their talk constructed these specific moments as presenting challenges to their nuanced working and caring schedules. Here I have concentrated on the discourse practices and discourse resources in parent's talk about their individual strategies to manage these specific moments. In doing so, I have highlighted excerpts with talk about the nuanced strategies adopted by both part-time and full-

time workers, mothers and fathers, professional and non-professional workers as individuals. As parents talked about responding to cancelled childcare and delays at work, they positioned themselves (and sometimes partners and grandparents) in accounts of their strategies to respond to these moments.

Some of the excerpts presented talk about the level of flexibility embedded within their employment when considering their individual reconciliation of care or work arrangements during moments when childcare had been cancelled or delays at work. I analysed talk about variable flexibility across the labour market in terms of responding to cancelled childcare. Some parents talked of changing careers or changing employer to secure, what they describe as, more flexible working to respond to moments of sick children and cancelled childcare. In terms of service work, interviewees who were both professionally qualified (such as teachers and care managers) and non-professionally qualified (including hairdresser and security guard) talked about different opportunities for them as individuals to work flexibly.

Significantly, the analysis in this chapter has illuminated talk about the individual strategies of the working parent's reconciling working and caring when childcare is cancelled or they are delayed at work. Discourses as systems of meaning are ways of representing ourselves and the social world. They are located in language, social practices of working and caring, and institutions such as the family and the labour market. Thus the analysis of parents talk provides opportunities to consider what some scholars have termed the overlap and tensions between structure and agency, the individual and society. (Burr, 2003). According to Marx Ferree (2010) discourses provide individuals with tools for making meaningful choices, which are imbued with implicit and explicit gender, race, sexual and national meanings. In this sense, the parents talked about their individual strategies for dealing with disruptions which drawing on wider discourses about structural features such as employment flexibility. In doing so, the tension between structure and agency can be considered discursively through the blending of analysis attending to both discourse resources (wider discourses of caring and working) and discourse practices (devices, positioning and stake management). In this analysis I have framed the parents as social agents using discursive practices within wider discourses of caring and working (Wetherell, et al

2001b). According to Burr (2003) a blended approach to discourse analysis aims to transcend the individual / society dualism debate often criticised for its simplicity and masculinist binary opposition of either / or.

The problem seems to lie in the way that the individual and society are seen as the two components of a dichotomy. In the real world, we never actually see 'society' on the one hand and 'individuals' on the other. One solution to the individual /society problem is therefore to suggest that this is a false dichotomy, a division that is an artefact of intellectual analysis by human minds and not a division that represents discrete phenomenon. (Burr, 2003: 184).

Following Burr's (2003) suggestion, parents as individual social agents manage disruptions to caring and working arrangements by adopting individual strategies. However these can be framed within research which acknowledges the complex interrelationship of social structure and individual agency. In the forthcoming chapter I wish to go on to consider this in more depth.

Needless to say, in this chapter, I found it helpful to frame the interviewees' participation in the research as adding to their already complex work-family schedules. Furthermore, by drawing on my own reflexive practise I have considered that once I became a working parent myself I positioned my own individual strategies alongside my participants. Here I have illustrated that parents, myself included, talk about individual strategies of work-family reconciliation, prescribing to and being prescribed by cultural and societal structures including the gendered institutions of work and the family. In the following final chapter, I attempt to extend this argument by suggesting that this thesis adds to existing knowledge by analysing parent's talk to reveal the interrelationship of the macro-level (wider discourses and social structures) and micro-level (individual working parents) in relation to working and caring.

## Chapter Eight: Concluding Discussions

### 8.1 Introduction

I begin this chapter by revisiting the thesis aims, drawing together the different chapters into a summary. Following the summary, I present the subsequent sections; *Implications for research*, *Policy recommendations* and *Research challenges*.

In the following section, *Implications for research*, I call for future research attending to both macro-level and micro-level analysis of working parent's caring and working practices.<sup>74</sup> In chapter two I considered data on working and caring participation at the macro level (specifically nationally in the UK) including large scale quantitative data such as labour force participation. At the micro-level, chapters five six and seven, focused on fine grained discourse analysis of interview talk. As such, in this thesis, I considered discourses of caring and working for mothers and fathers at the macro-level and micro-level of analysis. With this in mind, in the section below, *Implications for research*, I advocate future research which attends to both macro-level and micro-level analysis of working parent's caring and working practices to develop knowledge and understanding of the intricate constitutive network of, the individual parent, the social practices of caring and working in which they engage, the social structure within which they live and the discourses which frame these. I argue my doctoral study provides an original contribution to knowledge by considering both the performative aspects of language through discourse analysis (at a micro-level) whilst also reiterating the influence of wider social, embodied and material circumstances (at a macro-level).

In the *Policy recommendations* section I argue that there should be a (re)valuing of the relationship between caring and working within the context of twenty-first

---

<sup>74</sup> As discussed in chapter one and two, this draws on Gambles et al's (2006) *The Myth of Work-Life Balance*, which calls for research on gender, care and work, considering the multiple levels of nations, societies, communities, organisations, families and individuals. Whilst I acknowledge Gambles et al's (2006) wider call, this extended beyond the remit of this thesis and instead I focused on data at the micro-level (individuals talk) and the macro-level (UK).



century UK work-family reconciliation policy. I advocate renaming the Department of Work and Pensions, the Department of Care, Work and Pensions. Alongside this, I recommend policy makers are proactive in combining what Duncan Smith (2004: online) describes as 'hands-on experience, public involvement, academic rigour and effective political engagement to spark radical public policy change'.

The third section of this chapter, *Research Challenges*, attends to the challenges I faced in this study including recruiting both mothers and fathers as participants and the reification of gender binaries. Finally, I revisit my position within the doctoral journey in line with the reflexive approach I adopted throughout the study.

## 8.2 Thesis summary

I began this thesis by making clear the key concepts of work-life, work-family, work-life balance and work-family reconciliation. I drew on a range of key literature, critically considering the usage, meanings and development of these concepts within the UK work-family policy context. In chapter two, *Reviewing the work-family reconciliation policy landscape*, I note that, whilst work-life balance discourse has become the far most researched and dominant discourse within the field of work, family and life (Lewis, 2010), I chose to focus on work-family reconciliation, in short, because this study focuses on working parents, thus work-family rather than work-life is more fitting in this thesis. Importantly, I also noted that, both the concepts of work-life and work-family delineate paid work from other aspects of life including family (a point I return to later in this chapter to consider the constructed value of paid work and informal care). Throughout the thesis I defined work-family reconciliation as providing meaning to the linkages between the rhythms and exigencies of family life and paid employment (Daly, 2010).

Once I had clarified the key concepts of work-life, work-family, work-life balance and work-family reconciliation, chapter two focused on tracing the development of UK work-family reconciliation policy between the 1990s and early twenty-first century. I considered the complex social, political, economic and cultural context of this development. This was linked to the study's *aim one*;

*Critically understand early twenty-first century UK work-family reconciliation policy landscape.*

I drew on qualitative and quantitative data on mothers' and fathers' labour force and caring participation within early twenty-first century UK to present the complex picture of the work-family reconciliation policy landscape in which working parents practice caring and working. With reference to the discourses of family-friendly working and flexible working (situated within work-family reconciliation policy), I critically reviewed early twenty-first century UK work-family reconciliation policy landscape (aim one). I noted that these discourses had historically focused on women (especially mothers). As such, in chapter two I considered the gendered assumptions and constructions of caring and working embedded within UK work-family reconciliation policy. Alongside this, I also critically considered the culturally, historically, socially and politically constructed value of paid work within work-family reconciliation policy.

Aim two of the thesis was to;

*Critically understand the historical, social and cultural context of gendered working and caring practices and discourses.*

I considered this aim in chapter three. I began chapter three, *Gender, paid work and care*, by turning my attention to the concepts of gender, care, work and family. Drawing on early Anglo-American feminist scholarship (located within the twentieth and early twenty-first century), I critically examined these concepts throughout chapter three, unpacking their constructed meanings through historicizing (Irving, 2008; Steedman, 2005; Scott, 1994). Historicizing, as I clarify in chapter three, means considering the concepts historical but also social, cultural and political constructed meanings (Scott, 1994). Having focused on the relationship between gender, paid work and informal caring, feminist scholarship has spotlighted legal, social, political and economic inequalities between men and women in Anglo-American societies since industrialisation (late eighteenth and early nineteenth century). In this sense, industrialisation, as a historic event, was significant in changing work and family thus it provided me with a starting point in the chapter to understand gendered working and caring practices.

Addressing aim two, in chapter three and later data analysis chapters (five, six and seven), I also discussed the historical, cultural and social development of gender trajectories of caring and working often cited in contemporary studies about gender, work and care in early twenty-first century Britain (Ellison, et al, 2009). Importantly, I make clear in both chapter one, (*Thesis Introduction*) and chapter three, that I am using the term 'contemporary' to refer to early twenty-first century, as framed by Ellison et al (2009). By reviewing contemporary research studies, I asked, what are traditional gendered trajectories of caring and working and how have they been established and (re)constructed in Anglo-American societies? To answer these questions, throughout chapter three, I critically examined the historical, social and cultural context of gendered working and caring practices and discourses (aim two).

Key to chapter three was my consideration of the inextricable connectedness of men and women as they live out gender through interactions with each other as mothers and fathers, workers and carers. By critically reviewing feminist scholarship, I argued that, within the rubric of gender relations, it is necessary to include men as social agents alongside women when undertaking research into gender, work and family. Linked to chapter four – *Methodology*, I presented an extensive discussion of how I recruited both mothers (nine) and fathers (five) in the study (discussed later in this chapter also). In brief, chapter four detailed my empirical semi-structured qualitative interviews with fourteen working parents. (The interviewees all had children under five years old and worked part-time and full-time in professional and non-professional jobs). Chapter four established the methodological framework and my chosen blended approach to discursively analyse<sup>75</sup> the interviewees' talk. Specifically, I considered my analysis of discourse practices and discourse resources in working parent's interview talk about their caring and working practices. The data analysis was presented in three chapters as follows; Chapter five – *Discourses of working*, Chapter six – *Discourses of caring* and, Chapter seven - *Cancelled childcare and delays at work*. Notably, these data analysis chapters presented examples of parent's talk about

---

<sup>75</sup> Discussion of debates within discourse studies and my choices of analysis methods are made in chapter four and an overview is given later in this chapter.

caring and working practices during my interviews with them. These chapters were specifically linked to aim three;

*Analyse working parents' interview talk about their working and caring practices to critically consider what discourse practices and discourse resources they mobilise to position themselves within discourses of caring and working.*

In chapters five, six and seven, my empirical data analysis focused on discourses of working and caring, having established the prevalence of these discourses within work-family reconciliation policy in the earlier literature and policy chapters. Framing these discourses theoretically as informing the practices of which they speak (Foucault, 1972), I examined the interview transcripts, asking, how do working parents talk about their work-family reconciliation practices? This analysis presented the complex relationship of caring and working discourses and practices at the macro-level of wider policy discourse and the micro-level of participants talk. To structure this analysis I expedited my interpretation of a blended version of discourse analysis (Wetherell et al, 2001a).

As the UK's social, political and economic landscape continues to experience transformation, some commentators have called for contemporary work-family research which responds to these changes. Throughout the chapters I have stated that my response to this call has been to undertake qualitative research into work-family reconciliation which has a two-fold focus on discourses of caring and working. Namely, I have considered both the performative aspects of language through discourse analysis whilst also reiterating the influence of wider social, embodied and material circumstances. Burr (2003) conceptualises this within the broader agency / structure debate. Amongst this debate, scholars have deliberated on the relationship between the individual and society and the direction of their influences. Notwithstanding the significance of scholarly interest in the dichotomy, I chose to adopt Burr's (2003: 188) conceptualisation that:

[d]iscourses are not simply a product of either social structure or individuals but both. Such conceptualisation allows us to retain some notion of personal agency and to see discourse as a valid focus for forces of social and personal change.

In other words, the individual parent, the social practices of caring and working in which they engage, the social structure within which they live and the discourses which frame these, all constitute part of an intricate network. I wish to suggest that within the methodological framework of this research I have built a scaffold to develop knowledge and understanding of the intricate network in which individual's agency and societal structures influence the lives of working mothers and fathers (and the inextricably connected work and family practices).

In practical terms, I discussed wider discourses of working and caring whilst choosing a fine-grained qualitative approach to analyse working parents' talk. For me, my adopted approach to discourse analysis presented a form of interview talk analysis to illuminate how working parents (re)position themselves within and draw on wider caring and working discourses (which I suggest are embedded within UK work-family reconciliation policy). Simply put, my methodological choices were influenced by my ontological and epistemological beliefs that, the individual parent, their engagement in caring and working practices and the social structure of work and family and associated discourses, all constitute part of an intricate network. It was this intricate network I aimed to capture. In doing so, my findings revealed a richly complex representation of working parents' talk about caring and working, often unpublished in mainstream work-family reconciliation literature and research.

To summarise the thesis, I have connected contemporary UK work-family reconciliation policy, feminist theory, social constructionist theory and empirical discourse analysis of working parents' talk, to critically consider the complex social phenomenon of working and caring for working parents of children under five. Having briefly summarised the thesis, I now turn to the main interlinked considerations that cut across its organisation into chapters. These are; *Implications for research, Policy recommendations and Research challenges*.

### **8.3 Implications for research**

Throughout this thesis, I argue that blending a discourse analysis of the wider discourses of caring and working and the discourse practices of individual parents

presented evidence of the intricate constitutive network of the individual mother/father/family, their engagement in working and caring practices, the social structure within which they live and the gendered discourses framing these. Below I discuss the implications for research. Firstly, I turn to research which attends to both macro-level and micro-level data analysis. (Defined earlier both in chapters one and two and reiterated at the start of this chapter.)

### **8.3.1 Research attending to both macro-level and micro-level analysis of working parent's caring and working practices**

By presenting a critical review of the policy landscape in chapter two, I examined the macro picture of working and caring participation in contemporary UK. Drawing on both national and international statistics on UK work-family reconciliation (ONS, 2011, OECD, 2010) I documented several related demographic and labour market changes including; the reconfiguration of paid work and the increased participation of women, especially mothers, in the labour force in the past four decades. Given this context, I argue that this thesis is timely in critically exploring work-family reconciliation<sup>76</sup> policy as relevant and current to the UK in the early twenty-first century.

As noted in chapter two, policy makers have historically used large scale data sources to develop a macro picture of work and caring participation to assess the impact of policy intervention (Edwards and Gillies, 2012). This thesis contributes to scholarship and research on work-family reconciliation by positioning qualitative data alongside quantitative data. In line with Skeggs (2013), I argue that large scale quantitative data has been the preferred data used by policy makers to inform policy and has historically over shadowed qualitative research and its capacity to provide detailed insights into working and caring practices of individuals and families (ibid). Alongside quantitative research, policy makers

---

<sup>76</sup> For the purpose of helpfulness, to reiterate, the concept 'work-family reconciliation' provides meaning to the linkages between the rhythms and exigencies of family life and paid employment (Daly (2010). However, I recognise and discuss, in chapter two, a number of different incarnations (Lewis and Campbell, 2007a, 2007b) with which, work and family linkages have been discursively constructed within the landscape of social, political and economic change in the United Kingdom.

should seize opportunities to actuate qualitative data as it captures the fine-grained particularities of caring and working practices. My own research presents timely insights into the ways in which working parents talk about caring and working practices which I have framed within the work-family reconciliation policy context in early twenty-first century UK. For instance, despite large scale quantitative data providing evidence of the take up rates of flexible working, through this study I have analysed parents' talk about their flexible working. By doing so, I have analysed talk about their nuanced work-care arrangements often glossed over in large-scale data. For instance, in chapters five, six and seven, mobilising discourses of flexible working and part-time working, Allana and other participants talk about their employer's expecting them (without discussion or negotiation) to maintain the same level of work production despite their capacity to do this reduced once they shift from full-time hours to part-time. Thus, qualitative research facilitated the analysis of the fine-grained detail of difficulties these specific parents' raised in the interviews about this.

Early in the research process I laboured over the on-going debates about there not being one approach to discourse analysis which is exclusively 'right' (Gee, 2005). In the end, I chose a blended version and can now confidently argue that this sits comfortably with my research beliefs. (I have detailed my ontological and epistemological considerations in chapter four.) Specifically, I argue that my adopted research approach, problematizes dominant mainstream research methods, hierarchically located, legitimising only certain 'kinds' of data, information and sources (Stanley and Wise, 1993; Haraway, 1988). My methodology chapter provided a springboard to the data analysis in chapters five, six and seven, by arguing that ideological dogmatism encumbers thinking, individuals may fear the consequences of thinking differently from the dominant group or because they discontinue the practice of thinking inversely. I have argued that this blended discourse analysis approach recognises scholarly debates about what is worthy of note, what should be presented/sourced as universal and the patriarchal values associated with this scholarship (Willig, 2008; Haraway, 1988). I believe policy makers should consider the value of this discursive fine grained data in informing the policy making process. (I discuss this in the following section, *Policy recommendations*)

To summarise, policy makers have historically used large scale data sources to develop a macro picture of work and caring participation and assess the impact of policy intervention. I advocate future research which attends to what Gambles et al (2006) describe as multiple levels of analysis. In the case of this thesis I have considered both macro-level and micro-level analysis of working parent's caring and working practices to develop knowledge and understanding of the intricate constitutive network of, the individual parent, the social practices of caring and working in which they engage, the social structure within which they live and the discourses which frame these. I argue my doctoral study provides an original contribution to knowledge by considering both the performative aspects of language through discourse analysis (at a micro-level) whilst also reiterating the influence of wider social, embodied and material circumstances (at a macro-level).

### **8.3.2 Studying discourses of caring and working**

Linked to my point above, in considering the research implications I note that, whilst my adopted blended analysis approach presented the opportunity to consider the wider discourses of caring and working alongside the discourse practices of individual parents, it also presented challenges. Notwithstanding the richness of the interview talk and its analysis, I did sometimes feel overwhelmed by the large corpus of data. To manage this I returned to the discourses of caring and working which had emerged from chapter two as discourses within work-family reconciliation policy. As I have discussed in chapter four, it may appear a crude approach to separate discourses<sup>77</sup> of caring and working; however, I found it a pragmatic approach to what was a daunting task of organising and writing the chapters. Importantly, throughout the chapters I frame the discourses of working and caring as intersecting. However, I felt that the separation of these chapters in this way was in line with the thesis aims and provided a clear logical structure to what was a complex analysis procedure within an intricate methodological scaffold. My third data analysis chapter (chapter seven) brings together the data

---

<sup>77</sup> See chapter three for my discussion of the separation of caring and working with reference to Hochschild (1989)



on both caring and working discourses to explore examples in the interview talk about *Cancelled childcare and delays at work*. However, in considering the research implications of the thesis, I suggest that there is opportunity to revisit the large corpus of data to consider the intersections of caring and working discourses further. Following Taylor's (2001: 39) framing of data analysis as an iterative process, I recognised that:

Eventually there will be a range of possibilities to explore further. It will almost certainly be necessary to focus on some at the expense of others, leaving unfinished avenues for later exploration. Discourse data are 'rich', which means that it is probably impossible to reach a point where the data are exhausted, with nothing more to find in them because the analysis is complete.

Thus implications to future research are that consideration should be given to what Parker (1992) describes as the reification of discourses. He defends the signposting of discourses (such as caring and working) in research by suggesting it performs the crucial function of enabling a more effective exploration of power networks (this links to my next section on gender and power networks).

A strong form of the argument would be that discourses allow us to see things that are not 'really' there, and that once an object has been elaborated in a discourse it is difficult not to refer to it as if it were real. Discourses provide frameworks for debating the value of one way of talking about reality over other ways....Discourse analysis deliberately systematises different ways of talking so we can understand them better (Parker, 1992: 5).

Thus, here I argue that, writing up into three main chapters permitted me to ask a number of questions about what sorts of assumptions appeared to underpin what was being said throughout the large corpus of data about caring and working and how it was being said by working parents. The data analysis was a culmination of the analysis procedure which enabled me to question taken-for-granted assumptions within the interview talk about caring and working, attending to the constructed nature of social reality as it was (re)constructed. In making this point, I believe that there is potential for future research on discourses of caring and working on the proviso that researchers should be address the considerations raised by Parker (1992). In other words, future research which attends to both macro-level and micro-level analysis of working parent's caring and working practices will pose challenges as Parker's (ibid) caution against the reification of

discourses suggests. However, the signposting of caring and working discourses, at the macro-level of society and individual level of people's talk, functions to enable a more effective exploration of power networks including gender (Burr, 2003) (I discuss gender specifically below). Thus I advocate future research which adopts a two-fold focus on discourses of caring and working, namely, the performative aspects of language and the influence of wider social, embodied and material circumstances to present discourse analysis rich in discussions about discourses at the macro-level of society and social groups and micro-level of individual working parents.

### **8.3.3 Gender, paid work and unpaid caring**

According to Daly (2010), economic and labour-market concerns shape the UK's work-family reconciliation policy agenda. As such, policy discourse presents challenges for the caring and working practices of the working parents interviewed in this thesis. For instance, the data I presented in chapters five, six and seven gave instances of these challenges as parents talked about how both working and informal caring takes enormous amounts of time, effort and resources. In the talk, the discourse practices they used often positioned informal caring in opposition or subordinate to paid work. For example, in Sarah and John's excerpts in chapter seven they use active voicing to talk about their line manager's requests that their career should be chosen over caring for their sick child. This talk constructed an either /or relationship between caring and working.

Connecting the discourse analysis (chapters five, six and seven) with my critical review of work-family reconciliation policy landscape (chapter two), I argue that, whilst work-family reconciliation policy advocates developments, such as flexible working, policy discourse was initially aimed at women (particularly mothers) (Lewis, 2010). Additionally, the Flexible working taskforce (2009) established by the Department of Work and Pensions mobilised discourses of paid work with reference to work patterns and employees thus constructing individuals as, firstly, workers, with additional informal caring responsibilities (Featherstone, 2009). Thus, as explained in chapter two, flexible working discourse within work-family

policy elevates the cultural value of paid work. A key insight throughout the chapters was that the practicality of reconciling work and family is problematic when differential values are placed on caring and working.

UK work-family reconciliation policy has historically been driven by economic priorities which I critically examined in chapter two (Lister, 1997). Through this study, I suggest that, as individuals become parents their capacity as workers can change, as can their independence due to their dependent children and the associated care needed by their children (ibid). To understand the challenges of reconciling working and family posed to working parents, in chapter three I pointed to working and caring as discourses historically, culturally and socially grounded in problematic universalised gendered<sup>78</sup> assumptions about men and women as workers and carers (Williams, 2010). These are entrenched within work-family reconciliation policy, contributing to particular dominant and enduring constructions of the mother as carer and father as breadwinner provider (ibid).

Throughout the thesis I have noted that, feminist scholarship has problematized the gendered assumptions embedded in caring and working discourses over centuries (Rowbotham, 2012). In chapter three, I have critically reviewed the wide ranging feminist scholarship on gender, family and work to critically examine the historical, social and cultural context of gendered working and caring practices and discourses. Using the example of Lewis and Guillari, (2005) in chapter two, I reviewed their critique of the UK Government's work-family reconciliation policy emphasis on economic gains (in terms of tax revenues and women's employment) rather than the state's role in prioritising and providing much needed quality state provided childcare and overall support for the informal carer. Furthermore I presented international comparative evidence from Sigle-Rushton and Kenney (2004). They reviewed work-family policy in fifteen European Union countries, (2004) stating that, unlike some EU countries, historically, the UK has reluctantly and minimally accepted some EU directives, choosing instead to reinforce traditional gendered caring and working within policy (ibid). Thus, emerging from the synthesis of chapters I recognised that a feminist scholarship facilitates the

---

<sup>78</sup> Whilst I recognise gender disadvantage intersects with class, race, age, sexuality and (dis)ability) I have discussed this in chapters three and four.

troubling of gendered assumptions embedded within UK work-family reconciliation policy. Namely, whilst the policy discourse encourages all parents to be economically active, both my empirical data (chapters five, six and seven) and review of the macro picture (chapter two) revealed evidence of women providing a disproportionate amount of unpaid care and often employed part-time (ONS, 2011; Daly, 2010).

Furthermore, throughout the interviews, the parents talked about mothers undertaking disproportionate amounts of caring compared to fathers. This was regardless of their varied paid work commitments and the organisation of family practices within individual families (To discuss this in detail I analysed data from 'non-traditional'<sup>79</sup> couple Jake and Michala.) In drawing attention to the ascribed gendered inequities of unpaid care and paid work, I found that feminist scholarship provided me with the theoretical framework to critique the traditional gendered discourses of working and caring embedded within the policy landscape (Rowbotham, 2012).

#### **8.4 Policy recommendations**

In his book, *Making Policy Work* (2011) Peter John describes the policy making process as iterative, placing research and policy making as key components informing the process. In line with John (2011), as I discussed in chapter four, I adopted an iterative approach in this study. Whilst my early discussions have concentrated on the iterative process in terms of analysing the data and the intersections of caring and working discourses (Taylor, 2001), I believe the following policy recommendations extend the study by considering the relationship between the research and implications to the policy landscape of paid work and caring in the early twenty-first century.

---

<sup>79</sup> Medved and Rawlins (2011)

#### **8.4.1 Recommendation one:**

In chapter two I reviewed Work-family reconciliation policy implemented under the remit of the Department of Work and Pensions. Having problematized the policy, specifically its prioritisation of paid work and embedded enduring gendered assumptions of working and caring, I make the following recommendations. I argue that there should be a (re)valuing of the relationship between caring and working. To start this I advocate renaming the Department of Work and Pensions, the Department of Care, Work and Pensions. I believe this responds to Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Iain Duncan Smith's (2004: online) call for 'radical public policy change'. A renaming would foreground care alongside work and pensions, stimulating a revision of existing priorities within the government department to (re)value the relationship between caring and working. Having established a methodological framework which notes that, 'discourses are not simply a product of either social structure or individuals but both' (Burr, 2003, 188) I believe it recognises personal agency alongside wider social discourse when considering forces of social and personal change. In this sense, the renaming of Department of Care, Work and Pensions would stimulate change of the wider policy discourse and also the ways in which individual agents talk and make sense of caring and working. Specifically, 'to see discourse as a valid focus for forces of social and personal change' (Burr, 2003: 188) stimulates changes to how individual parents (as discourse agents) and wider society use language to construct the relationship between working and caring practices and their associated values within society. To signpost and give equal billing to caring and working in the title of the Department could be a change to stimulate a shift in the discourse mobilised which makes visible the relationship between caring and working to all stakeholders including working parents, employers, researchers and policy makers. Whilst this may appear a rather ambitious recommendation, it is my opening gambit in my policy recommendations.

In an effort to communicate details of my research study and disseminate my emerging findings, I attended a Government funded knowledge exchange workshop entitled 'Interactive Academic Engagement with Policy Stakeholders' on 11th December, 2013 (see appendix four for programme details of the event). This gave a small number of academics the opportunity to pitch ideas on how our research could impact policy. This was an invaluable experience given that policy makers are often hard to access. Camilla Sheldon (Head of Community Budgets, Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)) advised me that this first recommendation of renaming the Department could be a headline grabber within social networking communication such as Twitter which I should then use as a springboard to build networks to communicate details of my research study and its associated policy recommendations (see below).

#### **8.4.2 Recommendation two:**

The Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP, (Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and Chair, Social Justice Cabinet Committee) (2004: online) stated that, policy makers needed to 'combine hands-on experience, public involvement, academic rigour and effective political engagement to spark radical public policy change' Speaking as the Government's representative on policy making at the *Interactive Academic Engagement with Policy Stakeholders event* (2013)<sup>80</sup> Camilla Sheldon noted that academics have a responsibility to inform policy makers and politicians about what is happening 'at ground level' to individuals and communities as stakeholders in the policy process. Having reviewed the UK's work-family reconciliation policy landscape in early twenty-first century, it is my belief that the scholarship and qualitative research in this thesis presents opportunities to trigger debate about the complex social phenomenon of reconciling caring and working practices. Firstly, qualitative research could inform the future policy-making process by presenting an in-depth understanding of individuals caring and working practices and the support they need. (This is in line with my previous discussion of the overreliance on quantitative data in informing UK policy. (Skeggs, 2013))

---

<sup>80</sup> See appendix four for details.

Future policy making could be effectively informed by working parents and informal carers who, themselves (as framed in this thesis as discourse agents), could talk about the support they need to fulfil their working and caring responsibilities. (Below I discuss the importance of including both mothers and fathers as participants in qualitative work-care research.) Fine-grained qualitative research could represent and engage with the complex, plural and ambiguous accounts of working parents caring and working practices which is often glossed over in large scale quantitative research.

Furthermore, learning from the narrow focus of universalism in past scholarship on gender, work and care, qualitative discourse research could consider gender alongside intersections of race, class, sexuality, age and (dis)ability to gain a greater understanding of the different positions of power men and women mobilise as workers and carers, mothers and fathers. I am recommending here that policy makers engage more effectively with a wider range of individuals and organisations than governments have traditionally done. Beebeejaun, Durose, Rees, Richardson, and Richardson (2013) suggest that there is a need to shift the existing policy framework to position citizens (in all their diversity) as active rather than passive recipients of services, participants in communities and workers in organisations.

The National Communities Resource Centre presents one example of a venue in which policy stakeholders including policy makers, citizens, politicians and employers can meet face-to-face to discuss policy issues collaboratively. As I have attended The National Communities Resource Centre in Trafford Hall myself I recognise that facilitating such a collaborative approach to the policy making process is no mean feat. However, this is a resource I intend to use to engage as a researcher, working mother and active citizen wishing to be part of the policy making process on gender, care and work. The recommendations I make here are in line with those made by The Cabinet Office in *What works: evidence centres for social policy* (2013). The report announced the establishment of evidence centres aimed to align academia, policy makers, researchers and stakeholders. All parties can engage with the evidence centres who host a range of communication platforms (ibid).

Whilst I have identified The National Communities Resource Centre as a physical environment in which to attend and engage with the policy making process. I also communicate details of my research by using social media tools. According to Sheldon (2013) social media tools are powerful mediums at times when there is potentially a rapid turnaround in government with cabinet ministers (particularly junior cabinets ministers) often (re)shuffled into different roles and responsibilities. Sheldon (2013) notes this puts impetus on ministers to engage in a timely fashion with research as it emerges so that they can mobilise it to their best interests. The speed of communicating and disseminating emerging research using technology such as social networking makes it conducive to the dynamic nature of policy making in early twenty-first century.

I also use more traditional forms of dissemination can sit alongside social networking. For instance, as part of my engagement with the policy making process, I have already disseminated evidence in the form of academic papers (Yarwood, 2011; 2013) and conference presentations (see detailed list in the appendix). These communication mediums present opportunities to provide more detailed attention to the ways in which the study's rich qualitative data can contribute to existing evidence base on work-family reconciliation research.

## **8.5 Research Challenges**

### **8.5.1. Mothers and fathers as participants in qualitative research**

In the sections above, I have recommended that policy makers engage more effectively with a wider range of individuals and organisations than governments have traditionally done. Citing Beebeejaun et al (2013) I have argued for a shift from the existing policy framework so that citizens (in all their diversity) are active rather than passive recipients of services. This includes participants in local communities and workers in organisations. I have repeatedly stated in this thesis that becoming a parent is a profound life event (of which I have documented my own experience reflexively). In this study, I have reviewed evidence stating that women's and men's experiences of parenting vary, marked with long-term



systemic gender inequalities (Doucet, 2006). In chapter three, I noted that, historically, work-family reconciliation policy has focused on women and mothers (O'Brien, 2005). There has been a burgeoning body of research<sup>81</sup> examining both mothers' and fathers' work and care practices (Fatherhood Institute, 2010). With this in mind I call for further work-family research which recruits both mothers and fathers<sup>82</sup> as participants. My rationale for interviewing both mothers and fathers was that I wanted to maximise my potential to capture fine grained data which would provide insight into mothers' and fathers' talk about caring and working. By analysing the interviews discursively I was able to trace the subject positions the participants took up in discourses of working and caring. In chapters five, six and seven I analyse the use of discourse practices in talk with reference to the gendered constructs of mother and father embedded within the discourses of caring and working.

In chapter four I considered evidence from some researchers that men as fathers can demonstrate a reluctance to participate in qualitative research on gender and family practices (Doucet, 2006). Nevertheless, burgeoning work-family research appears to evidence researchers' concerted efforts to encourage fathers and mothers to participate in studies on gendered practices of caring and working (Ellison et al, 2009). In my own research I found fathers more reluctant to participate in the study than mothers (as I discussed in chapter four). I recruited nine mothers and five fathers using a 'snowballing' recruitment approach. Often this involved participants acting as gatekeepers to other potential participants (Mason, 2009). (See chapter four for my detailed discussion). In my research design I did not state my intention to get the same number of mothers and fathers. Instead, following Taylor's suggestion, I decided that eventually I had developed a large corpus of data from those fourteen participants I had recruited within a set timeframe. In Taylor's (2001: 39) words, 'It will almost certainly be necessary to

---

<sup>81</sup> This literature is predominantly focused on the global North. As I have made clear in previous chapters for the purpose of this thesis I have focused on Anglo-American literature whilst acknowledging the growth of interest and valuable scholarly activity taking place internationally within the field.

<sup>82</sup> As I have documented in the methodology chapter of this thesis, this brought with it its own set of challenges, namely men were much more reluctant to participate than women, a finding that has been documented by Reynolds (2008) amongst other researchers. Featherstone (2009) and Doucet (2006) have also eloquently discussed mothers as gatekeepers in more general examination of caring practices.

focus on some at the expense of others, leaving unfinished avenues for later exploration'. As part of this, I noted that I spent more time talking to fathers about what the study entailed before they agreed to participate. Furthermore, participating mothers and fathers suggested that other fathers they knew refused to volunteer to participate because they were often full-time workers and felt the interviews would be a disruption to their already busy schedules (I have discussed this in more detail in chapter seven.)

Despite these points, I argue that this study was enriched by both fathers and mothers participating in the study. Specifically, in the *Methodology* chapter I detail how I chose a blended approach to discourse analysis because it provided a robust approach to the analysis of both mother's and father's talk. (Namely, my analysis of mothers and fathers discourse practices as they (re)position themselves within working and caring discourses, (Potter, 1996; Edwards, 2007)). Both mother's and father's talk added to my large corpus of rich data on discourse practices and discourse resources. Thus, I argue that, whilst recruiting working mothers and working fathers can be difficult (Doucet, 2006) those mothers and fathers who participated in my research presented research opportunities to develop knowledge and understanding of working and caring discourses and practices.

Doucet's (2006) feminist informed work on fathering notes that work-family literature often assumes men and women are interchangeable disembodied subjects. In contrast, she argues mothers and fathers are embodied subjects with inter-subjective, relational and normative cultural and social meanings framing them (ibid). In designing this thesis I was keen to explore and develop existing knowledge and understanding of the embodied, socially and culturally situated nature of mothering and fathering. As I have stated, whilst I chose to recruit both mothers and fathers in this study I found studies which focused on men as fathers or women as mothers valuable in providing discussions of the social, cultural and bodily context in which mothering and fathering are practiced (Thomson et al, 2011). Miller's work on mothering (2005) and fathering (2010) was influential in raising awareness of cultural inscription, social location and embodied acts of birth and breastfeeding embedded in men's and women's parenting narratives. By choosing to interview mothers and fathers I analysed their discourse practices and

the wider discourse resources they drew on. For instance, in chapter Six I consider excerpts which describe how their child's intensive care needs are met. Both mothers and fathers talked about the differences in mothers and fathers capacity to breastfeed. In doing so, breastfeeding through the night was embedded in the construction of intensive caring practices. Thus in my analysis of talk I was able to consider excerpts in which physiological capacity to breastfeed was intertwined with constructions of the mother as innate carer within a discourse of essentialism. Furthermore, mothers were constructed as more likely to be available to care due to their longer maternity leave entitlement compared to fathers (legally fathers have much shorter paternity leave entitlement<sup>83</sup>). In the interviews, talk suggested that once maternity and paternity leave had ended, differences between mother's and father's caring practices continued with mothers' greater availability to care through part-time working compared to men full-time working. In this sense, by interviewing both mothers and fathers in this study, my findings add to evidence of gendered caring and working whilst recognising these practices as culturally and socially situated and embodied in the UK at the time of the research taking place (Thomson et al, 2011; Miller, 2005; 2010). On the basis of these findings I subscribe to Doucet's (2006: 40) call for further gender, work and family research which appreciates that 'while the body does have biological and material base, it is nevertheless modified and variably enacted within different social contexts.' I have discussed this further in my academic journal articles on mothering (Yarwood, 2013) and fathering (Yarwood, 2011).

---

<sup>83</sup> Legally women have up to a year maternity leave whilst men have up to 2 weeks. At the time of writing this thesis, the coalition government were making changes to parental leave so that it could be shared between mothers and fathers. Critics such as the Fatherhood Institute have argued these changes do not go far enough in redressing the gender imbalance in parental leave. This is indeed a concern for work-family researchers and as I have said in chapter two, amidst parents making sense of things the policy context is shifting in time and place.

### 8.5.2 Reifying gender dualism

In the discourse analysis chapters (five, six and seven) I found many cases where parents talked about gendered differences in caring and working drawing on biological determinism in caring discourses (as I discuss in chapter five). Drawing on the traditions of feminist scholarship, I have traced the established debates on the essentialist nature of gendered differences (discussed in chapter three) and considered how these are mobilised or resisted in the interview talk (see chapters five, six and seven). In many instances, the excerpts from the interviews reveal the discourse practices participants use to mobilise or resist these essentialist gendered discourses. Whilst I advocate research involving both mothers and fathers as participants, I have been aware of what Holloway (1994) cautions as research which perpetuates notions of women as other to man which reify gender dualism. During my doctoral study, this posed challenges in that some of my analytic explanations of gender differences in the interview talk perpetuated gender dualism by drawing on notions of enduring gendered constructs of breadwinner father and primary carer mother from the interviewees' talk (Stokoe and Smithson, 2001). Integral to my decision making during the research process, I have consulted ethical guidance (Miller, Birch, Mauthner and Jessop, 2002) and, as such, I cannot or would not omit or ignore the gender dualism present in the interview talk. Drawing on social constructionist theory and feminist theory, I acknowledge that gender is continually referencing and improvising a socially scripted performance (Featherstone, 2009). As such, my blended discourse analysis approach captures this performativity by examining the language used in talk and discourse practices adopted by participants.

By examining discourses of caring and working, I considered essentialist constructions of women as mothers (Wager, 2000). In chapter three, I argued that, the social, cultural and historical constructions of men and women led some feminists to problematize the '[t]he male as the norm' (Willig, 2013: 6) and the 'Othering' of women (Letherby, 2003). Gendered discourses of caring and working are constitutive of constructing men and women (ibid). Feminists have evidenced how these discourses often worked to men's advantage over women's. However, this is overly simplistic as men and women do not have to be positioned

as opposing in a constructed hierarchy (Scott, 1994). Studies of men and masculinity have highlighted the challenge to men posed by the idealistic hegemonic man construction (Connell, 2001). My contribution to this existing knowledge is through establishing how discourse analysis can provide insights into how speakers, both women and men, position themselves in gendered discourses in more fluid, less absolute ways using discourse practices (Baxter and Wallace, 2009; Wetherell, 2001b). Whilst I accept that biological essentialism can constrict possible alternative ways of men and women doing working and caring, my interest lies in analysing both mothers' and fathers' talk to consider how they (re)position themselves within essentialist discourses. Doucet (2006) and Fuss (1989) advocate that 'essentially speaking we need to theorize essentialist spaces from which to speak and, simultaneously, to deconstruct those spaces and keep them from solidifying.' (Fuss (1989: 118) cited in Doucet (2006)). To do this I used the analytic tools of discourse analysis, to demonstrate how mothers' and fathers', as discursive agents, use discourse practices to (re)position themselves within and outside socially and culturally constructed essentialist spaces within caring and working discourses.

Additionally, I have recognised that 'where there are dichotomies, it is difficult to avoid evaluating one in relation to another' (Kessler and McKenna, 1978; 164). According to Stoke and Smithson (2001) inevitably a research approach which recognises the socially constructed nature of gender "may reinforce a 'two genders agenda' because any commentary that treats women and men as different groups reinforces the dichotomy." (2001: 245). For instance, the evidence of gendered caring and working patterns I considered in chapter two undeniably reveals women's increased participation in paid work alongside a continued disproportionate amount of unpaid caring responsibilities compared with men (Ellison et al, 2009). Alongside this I reviewed evidence of the gender pay gap in employment (OECD, 2010). Therefore, in highlighting gender differences in work and caring participation I have inevitably reinforced the two gender dichotomy (Stokoe and Smithson, 2001). However, adopting a discourse analysis research approach has facilitated my examination of the dichotomies within the discursive worlds my interviewees inhabit, and how they position themselves within these. This is in line with discourse analysts' assumption that people *do* things with their

language, the way people speak does much more than simply convey a picture of what they are describing (Wetherell et al 2001a).

As I have previously suggested, the constructions of mother as primary carer and father as breadwinner worker has been a version of gender relations prevalent in Anglo-American societies historically (Scott, 1994). In analysing talk, these gendered constructions were situated in subjective accounts about their individual nuanced strategies for reconciling work and family and the institutional practices and social structures of care provision and employment. To deny the prevalence of these gender constructions in talk would be to deny the constructive nature of language and action and the endurance of gendered constructions in caring and working discourses.

According to Philip (2013) any feminist analysis of gender, work and family should recognise the relationship between mothers' and fathers' experiences of parenting. At this stage in my doctoral journey, I concur with Gerson (2004) that, work-family researchers should explore the interdependence of gender relations. My own interpretation of this involved examining discourse practices and discourse resources in both mothers and fathers interview talk framed as individual discursive agents. In this thesis, discourse analysis facilitates an analysis of how the speakers position themselves within this gendered caring and working discourses, assuming that people *do* things with their language (Wetherell et al 2001a). As I have previously suggested, the gendered binaries of working and caring have been a version of gender relations prevalent in Anglo-American societies historically (Scott, 1994) therefore to deny it, is to deny the referential and citational notion of language and discourse (Butler, 1990). Foucault (1977) notes that by questioning what is given as universal and taken for granted (such as the essentialist gender dichotomy) we can contest this to examine what is contingent in limiting for instance how we do gender, work and family. With this in mind, I recommend that, further research should be designed to capture a rich corpus of interview talk from both mothers and fathers. I believe this would facilitate epistemologies on the complex social phenomenon of gender, work and family, capturing and analysing the talk of both working mothers and working fathers.

Whilst gender is the main focus of this thesis, I have attempted to suggest that the working parents I interviewed provide some examples of the intersectional social divisions within their biographies<sup>84</sup> (with both professional and non-professional workers, manual and non-manual occupations). As discussed in the *Methodology* chapter, I have not or wished not to claim a representational sampling. I am aware that, with a different cohort of participants, class, sexuality, race, ethnicity and (dis)ability could have emerged from the data. However, in this case, gender was foregrounded. In the interviews, talk demonstrated disproportionate levels of care between mothers and fathers regardless of their occupations. I have detailed analysis of this with reference to full-time professional working mother, Michala compared to non-professional part-time working father, Jake. I have also discussed the on-going debates of intersectionality within the literature (including feminist debates) whilst maintaining a focus on gender rather than class or race for example (Connell, 2001; Lawthom, 1999). My rationale was that I wished to contribute to the debates about work-family reconciliation policy and gender. Furthermore, I felt the methodology and framing of the interview talk provided opportunities to explore issues of individual biography as they occurred. In this sense I did not close down the potential for interviewees to discuss any aspects of their biographies which they deemed comfortable discussing in relation to work-family reconciliation. Had other points been raised in the interviews, I would have attempted to integrate these within the analysis.

My conceptualisation of gender is informed by a recognition that gender relations intersect with other types of social relations including class, sexuality, age, race, ethnicity (Connell, 2001) and dis/ability (Runswick-Cole and Goodley, 2011). Thus, during analysis, the ways in which working parents talked in the interviews, I framed gender within an identity project, assuming that mothers and fathers are gendered, raced, classed, aged, embodied and so forth. In chapter four I introduced the participants, sharing the personal biographical information (including the self-assigned age, class, sexuality etc) they disclosed during the data collection process. Gender conceptualisations are central to this thesis and I reiterate that my research focus was on the relationship between gender and

---

<sup>84</sup> See appendix three for full details of this

caring and working practices and discourses. However I did not close down opportunities to consider Connell's (2001: 49) suggestion that, to develop an understanding of gender we must 'go beyond gender' to understand dominant identity discourses.

## **8.6 What about me? Revisiting my position in the research journey**

Throughout the thesis I have mobilised the concept of reflexivity to locate myself in the research and its implications in knowledge production. As I have suggested,

Researchers' individuality, their particular topics, their samples, the theoretical and academic environments and social and cultural contexts in which they work all influence the ways in which these methods are used." (Mauthner and Doucet 1998: 128)

This thesis has been shaped by my ontological, epistemological, methodological and ethical considerations with the particularities of my doctoral journey shaping this study. My reflexive considerations were threaded throughout the chapters, including three distinct yet interrelated aspects of reflexivity. These were; my role as the researcher, my relationship with the research participants and thirdly, my relationship with wider epistemic communities including academic colleagues.

In practical terms, as an author and researcher, I spent time thinking and writing about the influences of my personal biography on the choices and approaches I have made during the research process. (In fact, this process continues as I think about the opportunities and challenges posed for me as a full-time working mother in academia during the writing of this final chapter.) In (re)visiting these aspects of my study, I have gained insights into the complex interlinking of the researcher/researched relationship and my personal biography in this study. As I have previously discussed, Coffey (1999) notes that qualitative researchers construct and write the lives of others whilst simultaneously negotiating and implicating themselves through interpersonal relationships with research participants.

Throughout this learning journey I have been challenged to interrogate the notions of the subjective, embodied self and the socio-political self as a researcher. In



doing, I have gained insights from literature, epistemic communities and the participants of the ways in which we negotiate powerful differences with others as socially and culturally situated embodied agents within the societies in which we work, care and study. As McLaughlin (2012) suggests, identities are fluid, continually altering and being redefined by ourselves and others, with parts of our identity being foregrounded depending on the situation. This became evident to me during the recruitment, development and maintenance of research relationships with the participants (discussed in chapter four). In situating myself within the research I consider my own changing personal biography to have bearing on this. Namely, as a white, British, professional working women who became pregnant in her late thirties with her first child during the course of this research<sup>85</sup>, I found the development and establishment of the researcher/researched relationship complex. In other words, once pregnant I found this was foregrounded by the participants in the interviews (I discuss this with detailed interview excerpt analysis in my publication, *Talking about the personal* (Yarwood, 2013))

The qualitative research framework adopted here enabled me to consider the intersubjectivity between the participants and myself (the researcher). According to Lawthom and Tindall (2011) interpretive qualitative research has the capacity to emphasise the rich interconnections of researcher and participant during interviews. However, this can involve mixed feelings about the rich and complex relationships. As a trained researcher, I was aware of the complex relationship between the researcher and researched. Thus, my changing parental status was a significant personal life experience which shaped my understanding, knowledge and interactions with others, including the research participants.

Being pregnant during the interviews provided me with a unique personal reference point as a researcher interviewing working parents. I wish to argue that in accordance with Coffey's (1999) work on, *The Ethnographic self*, the body is a site of discourse and action, representational of one's biography and the

---

<sup>85</sup> I had already undertaken interviews with five participants before I was pregnant. During pregnancy I undertook interviews with a further six participants and three after pregnancy.

subjective, embodied self and the socio-political self as a researcher. According to Twigg (2006) the messy empirical realities of the fleshy material body can trouble researchers. Speaking about the physical embodiment of pregnancy, Gatrell (2005) states that normative practices of talk assume it is acceptable to discuss it compared to other forms of physicality. However, as I was unaccustomed to people making explicit comments about my physical appearance before I became pregnant, I found some of the participants' questions and comments made me feel uncomfortable (Crossley, 2007). Mainstream literature suggests that employed pregnant women often feel they are problematized due to their perceived leaky bodies. Often this means pregnant women are positioned outside the normalised discourse of working (Gatrell, 2007). In the interviews, where participants commented on my pregnant body, they talked about their own and their partner's experiences of pregnancy and the physical aspects of childbirth (Johnson, et al, 2004). I believe my pregnant body was tangible in its physical state thus presented an embodied reference point to my identity which the participants drew on to position me in wider discourses (Oakley, 2005).

In line with the epistemological stance of this thesis, knowledge is constructed through language (Burr, 2003), I believe that the interviews were sites of performance. Within these performances, identities (including my own) were co-constructed and (re)negotiated. During the interviews, the participants themselves made relevant the complex nature of identity representations. Integral to this performance in talk was a shifting focus on various aspects of both my own identity and their identities (McLaughlin, 2012). One such example was my parental status. For instance, before I was pregnant I was a thirty something childfree woman. I felt that the participants used discursive practices to problematize my non-mother status based on the associations with age and expectations of mothering within women's reasonable life course (Sevón, 2005). Drawing on both my academic and personal knowledge, I was aware that non-mothers and ageing mothers are often marginalised with implied claims of selfishness and violation of the natural order. I also knew that there was evidence of the gradual rise in the age to which women give birth to their first child (Shaw and Giles, 2007). Equally I was also aware that I too was a participant in this process of co-construction in which representations of our identities were shaped

(Yarwood, 2013). I decided that this foregrounding of my parental status was part of the performance. Furthermore I suggest that my change in parental status presented an interesting case and this thesis incorporates my insights as a white, British, professional working woman who became pregnant in her late thirties with her first child during the course of this research.

At a very fundamental level, I believe that throughout the study I have signposted my belief that no research is value free. As part of this I have aimed to make these values and my research decisions visible (Goodley and Smailes, 2011). I have written specifically in chapter four about the challenges this has posed. Thinking and writing critically about my values and personal biography has enabled me to develop an understanding of qualitative discourse research as challenging yet enlightening. For me, work-family research can be enriched by researchers considering themselves as socially and culturally situated embodied discourse agents with fluid, changing identities influencing the research process in a myriad of ways. It is important that researchers locate themselves within the research alongside participants, as they simultaneously negotiate and implicate themselves through interpersonal relationships with research participants and the knowledge they co-construct.

## **8.7 Reflexivity**

Whilst sustaining a feminist engagement with the personal / political nexus, throughout the research process, I found that applying it to my analytic and reflexive work posed challenges in part, because of my awareness of navel gazing criticisms levelled at some qualitative researchers (Ramsey and Letherby, 2006). According to Mauthner and Doucet (1998), this aspect of reflexivity involves the complex processing and (re)defining of what it means to do research. Ultimately, I was aware of the possibility to make this thesis 'all about me' and I felt discomfort writing as a white, British, professional working woman because of the epistemic privilege that this had brought me. However, the feminist scholarship I reviewed in chapter three developed my understanding and knowledge of feminisms'

arguments for the value of interrogating the interconnectedness of the personal and the political (Maynard and Purvis, 1994). Feminism, Oakley (2005) argues, makes many people uncomfortable partly because the subject of who women are and what they want challenges our division between public and personal life.

Pelias (2009) responds to those critics who fear that writing about oneself, as the researcher, can lead to what has been called 'the loss of the Other'. Instead Pelias (2009) argues that writing about the self enables qualitative researchers to learn about their position in relation to others:

[I] pledge my allegiance to navel-gazing because all gazing, those kept private or those publicly shared, are social acts. To keep silent, to refuse to tell what one carries inside, is to acknowledge that all people are socially situated. Silence lives in awareness of consequences. I may not share because of shame or embarrassment, because of a sense of propriety, or because of an ethical responsibility to others, but each time I choose not to speak, I do so because I am thinking of the other. And when I tell the most intimate details of my life, I do so always aware all my personal feelings are located interpersonally. To be personal is to be with others. (Pelias, 2009: 355)

Although a wide variety of personal and professional experiences have contributed to my thinking and writing during the course of this thesis, I concur with Adams, Del Busso, Foster, Majumdar, Marzano and Papdima (2007) that my personal journey, connects with other feminist researchers in our shared commitments to political consciousness and an ethical responsibility to develop epistemologies which challenge taken-for granted gendered working and caring practices by exposing their historical, cultural and social context. According to Adams et al (2007: 294)

...[p]olitical consciousness can mean applying reflexivity as a methodological tool, as a way of producing ethical research that has the capacity to benefit both women and men in their real-world contexts.'

As such, in focusing on gender as a social construct and social relations, in which men and women are positioned relationally in discourses of caring and working, I made the decision to interview both mothers and fathers (as discussed earlier). However I am aware that whilst acknowledging women's historical marginalisation, overall, in simply interviewing men and women, this may be deemed reductionist in its universal and homogeneous constructions of gendered practices and

discourses. (Homogeneity and universality of class, race, ethnicity and (dis)ability have been discussed elsewhere in the thesis). Thus, in considering the process of reflexivity, I note that, 'Such a research practice does not involve specific normative commitments to an ideal world, that is, they are commitments about *how* we study the world even while we may differ on *what* kind of world we would like to bring about.' (Ackerly and True, 2010: 6-7). An example of this was that, whilst I question my focus on normalised constructs of mother and father within heteronormative relationships (Nicholson, 1990; Moore, 2012) I believe that this was a manifestation of the challenges I felt in positioning myself in feminist theory. By thinking reflexively about my personal location and my positioning in the research process, I was able to shift my thinking by accepting instead that feminist-informed research provided an opportunity for me to explore my position as a white, working professional mother in a heteronormative relationship. In other words, I saw the opportunities these presented for me personally and professionally to question the meaning of the normalised mother and father constructs often framed within heteronormative relationships. As suggested by Adams et al (2007) by doing this, feminism provides the means to develop politically, personally and academically through on-going reflexivity which challenges norms deeply embedded in policy, practice and research of caring and working and also within our own personal biography.

## 8.8 Summary

This thesis provides a unique contribution to the critical review of UK work-family reconciliation policy landscape in early twenty-first century. Drawing on discourse analysis of working mothers' and working fathers'<sup>86</sup> talk about their caring and working practices, I have suggested a need to (re)value the relationship between paid work and informal caring, recognising the policy implications as part of this. I believe this thesis provides an original contribution to knowledge of work-family reconciliation by adopting a methodological approach which considers both the performative aspects of language and the influence of wider discourses of caring

---

<sup>86</sup> With children under five years old.

and working. Adopting a reflexive research approach, I have recognised the large corpus of rich qualitative data developed from this study. In line with Taylor (2001) I have outlined the decisions I have made throughout the research process, leaving potential avenues for later exploration. This presents exciting opportunities to extend the research further in the future.

## References

- Acker, J. (1990). 'Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organization.' *Gender and Society* 4, pp.139-58.
- Ackerly, B. and True, J. *Doing Feminist Research in Political and Social Science*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan (2010).
- Adams, E., Del Busso, L., Foster, N., Majumdar, A., Marzano, L. and Papadima, M. (2007) 'Being Young Feminists: Discussions and (Dis)Contents'. *Feminism and Psychology* 17 (3) pp.291-294.
- Adams, E. and Dell, P. (2008) 'Being a 'good mother': A discourse analysis of women's experiences of breast cancer and motherhood. In *Psychology of Women Review*, Vol 10, No1, Spring 2008
- Anderson, M. (1980) *Approaches to the History of the Western Family 1500-1914*. In McKie, L. and Callan, S. (2012) *Understanding Families*. London: Sage.
- Anderson, Bridget (2000) *Doing the dirty work?: the global politics of domestic labour*. London : Zed Books
- Arendell T (2000) Conceiving and investigating motherhood: The decade's scholarship. *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 64(4) pp.1192–1207.
- Aviva (2010) *Ten times more stay-at-home-dads than ten years ago*. [Online] [Accessed on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2013] <http://www.aviva.co.uk/media-centre/story/6344/ten-times-more-stay-at-home-dads-than-10-years-ago/>
- Baxter, J. and Wallace, K. (2009) Outside in-group and out-group identities? Constructing male solidarity and female exclusion in UK builders' talk, *Discourse Society* 20 (4) pp.411-429.
- Beebejaun, Y., Durose, C., Rees, J., Richardson, J. and Richardson, L. (2013) 'Beyond Text: exploring ethos and method in co-producing research with communities' *Community Development Journal* 10. 1093
- Ben-Galim, D. (2011a) *Family Policy: Where next for parental leave and flexible working?* London: IPPR. [Online] [Accessed on September 15, 2012. <http://www.ippr.org/publication/55/1822/family-policy-where-next-for-parental-leave-and-flexible-working>

Ben-Galim, D. (2011b) *Parents at the centre*. London: IPPR. [Online] [Accessed on September 15, 2012] <http://inspiredbybabies.org.uk/Page4NewsandInformationresources/IPPR%2011%20Parents%20at%20the%20CentreParents%20at%20the%20Centre%201835.pdf>

Ben-Galim, D. (2011c) *Making the case for universal childcare*. London: IPPR [Online] [Accessed on September 15, 2012] <http://www.inspiredbybabies.org.uk/Page4NewsandInformationresources/IPPR%20making%20the%20case%20for%20Universal%20Childcare.pdf>

Benwell, B. and Stokoe, E. (2006) *Discourse and Identity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Berges, S. (2013) *Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the rights of woman*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Biggart, L. and O'Brien, M. (2010) 'UK Fathers' long work hours: Career stage or fatherhood?' *Journal of Fathering* 8 pp.341-361.

Blair-Loy, M. (2001) 'Cultural constructions of family schemas: The Case of Women Finance Executives'. *Gender and Society*, 15 pp.687 - 709

Bordo, S. (2003) *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (10<sup>th</sup> ed) London: University of California Press

Bradley, H. (1999) *Gender and Power in the workplace*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Bradley, H. (2013) *Gender* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed) London: Polity Press.

British Social Attitudes Survey (2012) *Gender, Work and Family*29 [Online] [Accessed on 9th December 2013] <http://www.bsa-29.natcen.ac.uk/read-the-report/work-and-wellbeing/introduction.aspx>

British Psychological Society (2009) *Code of Ethics and Conduct for the British Psychological Society*. [Online] [Accessed on 4th September 2009] [http://www.bps.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/code\\_of\\_ethics\\_and\\_conduct.pdf](http://www.bps.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/code_of_ethics_and_conduct.pdf)

British Sociological Association (2002) *Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association*. [Online] [Accessed on 11th April 2008] <http://www.britisoc.co.uk/about/equality/statement-of-ethical-practice.aspx>

Budig, M. and England, P. (2001) The Wage penalty for motherhood. *American Sociological review* 66 (2) pp.204-225

Budig, M. (2004) 'Feminism and the Family'. In Scott, J., Treas, J and Richards, M. (eds) *Sociology of the Family*. Oxford: Blackwells, pp.416-434



- Bunting, M. (2005). *Willing slaves*. London: Harper Perennial.
- Burns, D. and Walker, M. (2005) 'Feminist methodologies'. In Somekh, B. and Lewin, C. (eds) *Research Methods in the Social Sciences*. London: Sage.
- Burr, V. (2003) *Social Constructionism*. 2nd ed, Abingdon: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. London: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of 'sex'*. New York: Routledge and Society, 23, 945–973.
- The Cabinet Office. (2010) *The Coalition: Our programme for government*. London: HMSO.
- The Cabinet Office. (2013) *What works: evidence centres for social policy* London: HMSO.
- Cahusac, E. and Kanji, S. (2013) 'Giving up: How Gendered Organizational Cultures Push Mothers Out. *Gender, Work and Organization* 21 (1) pp.57-70
- Cameron, D. (1992). *Feminism and linguistic theory* (2nd ed.). London: Macmillan.
- Cameron, D. (1998). 'Gender, language and discourse: A review essay'. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture*.
- Cameron, D. (2001). *Working with spoken discourse*. London: Sage.
- Cameron, D. (2010) *Speech on families and relationships*. [Online] [Accessed on December 10, 2010] <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/speeches-and-transcripts/2010/12/speech-on-families-andrelationships-58035>
- Campbell, B. (2014) *Neoliberal neopatriarchy: the case for gender revolution*. [Online] [Accessed on January 6, 2014] <http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/beatrix-campbell/neoliberal-neopatriarchy-case-for-gender-revolution>
- Carabine, J. (2001). 'Unmarried motherhood 1830-1990: A genealogical analysis'. In M. Wetherell., S. Taylor. and S. Yates. (Eds.). *Discourse as data: A guide for analysis*. (pp. 267-309). London: Sage.
- Carrigan, T., Connell, R.W., and Lee, J. (1985). 'Toward a new sociology of masculinity'. *Theory and Society*, 14, pp.551-604.
- Chambers, D. (2012) *A Sociology of Family Life*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Charles, N, Davies, C. Aull; Harris, C. C. (2008) *Families in transition: social change, family formation and kin relationships*. Bristol : Policy Press.

Chodorow, N. (1978) *The Reproduction of Mothering*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Code, L. (1995) *Rhetorical spaces: essays on gendered locations*. London : Routledge.

Coffey, A. (1999) *The Ethnographic Self, Fieldwork and the Representation of Identity*. London: Sage Publications.

Collier, R. (2009). Fatherhood, law and fathers' rights: Rethinking the relationship between gender and welfare. In J. Herring, M. Choudry, and J. Wallbank (Eds.), *Rights, gender and family law* (pp. 119-143). London: Routledge.

Collier, R. (2012) 'Considerations on the support of fathers after separation or divorce', Keynote paper presented at Research Seminar and Report Launch: Supporting Fathers after separation or divorce at Friends House, Euston Rd, London, 18th October 2012,

Collins, P. Hill. (1986) 'Learning from the outsider within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought' *Social Problems*, 93 (6) pp.14-32

Collins, P. Hill (1990) *Black Feminist Thought*. Boston:: Unwin Hyman.

Collinson, D. and Hearn, J. (2001) 'Naming Men as Men: Implications for Work, Organization and Management'. In *The Masculinities Reader*, Whitehead and Barrett, (eds) Cambridge: Polity.

Coltart, C. and Henwood, K. (2012) On paternal subjectivity: a qualitative longitudinal and psychosocial case analysis of men's classed positions and transitions to first-time fatherhood *Qualitative Research* February 2012 vol. 12 no. 1 35-52

Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers (1989) [Online] [ Accessed on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2013] <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/areas/industrialrelations/dictionary/definitions/communitycharterofthefundamentalsocialrightsofworkers.htm>

Confederation of British Industry (CBI) (2009) *Employment Trends Survey: Easing Up*. London: CBI.

Connell, R.W. (1995). *Masculinities*. Cambridge: Polity Press

Connell, R.W. (2001) 'The Social Organization of Masculinity'. In Whitehead, S.M. and Barrett, F.J. (Eds) *The Masculinities Reader* Cambridge: Polity Press pp.30-50.

Craig, L., and Sawrikar, P. (2009). 'Work and family: How does the (gender) balance change as children grow?' *Gender, Work and Organization*. 16, pp.684-709

Crompton, R. (2006) *Employment and the Family. The Reconfiguration of Work and Family Life in Contemporary Societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

Crossley, M.L. (2007) 'Childbirth, Complications and the illusion of 'Choice': A Case Study. *Feminism and Psychology*, 17, pp.543 -563

Daly, K. (2007). *Qualitative methods for family studies and human development*. London: Sage.

Daly, M. (2010) 'Shifts in family policy in the United Kingdom under New Labour' *Journal of European Social Policy*, 20 (5) 433 - 43

Day, K., Gough, B., and McFadden, M. (2003). Women who drink and fight: A discourse analysis of working-class women's talk. *Feminism and Psychology*, 13, 141-158.

de Beauvoir, S. (2010) *The Second Sex* ( translated by Borde, C. and Malovany-Chevallier, S.) London: Vintage.

den Dulk, L. (2001). *Work-Family Arrangements in Organizations: A Cross-national Study in the Netherlands, Italy, the United Kingdom and Sweden*. Amsterdam: Rozenberg.

Dean,H. (2007) 'Tipping the Balance: The Problematic Nature of Work–Life Balance in a Low-Income Neighbourhood' *Journal of Social Policy*, 36 (04) pp 519 - 537

Denzin, N.K., Lincoln, Y.S. (2008) *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, (3rd ed). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Department for Education and Employment (1998) *Meeting the childcare challenge*, London: HMSO.

Department for Work and Pensions (2009a) *Building Britain's Recovery: Achieving Full Employment*. London: HMSO

Department for Work and Pensions (2009b) *Flexible Working: working for families, working for business*. London: HMSO

Department for Work and Pensions (2010) *Flexibility for the future: The Government's response to the recommendations of the Family Friendly Working Hours Taskforce*. London: HMSO

Dermott, E. (2008) *Intimate Fatherhood*, London: Routledge.

Dermott, E., Featherstone, F. and Gabb, J. 'Fragile Fathering: Negotiating Intimacy and Risk in parenting practice – a study of fathers' experiences of co-parenting arrangements and the personal challenges for fathers with children from multiple partners.' Keynote paper presented at *Research Seminar and Report Launch: Supporting Fathers after separation or divorce* at Friends House, Euston Rd, London, 18th October 2012,

Dex, S. (2004) 'Work and Families'. In Scott, J., Treas, J and Richards, M. (eds) *Sociology of the Family*. Oxford: Blackwells, pp.435-456.

Dex, S. and Scheibl, F. (1999) 'Business performance and family-friendly policies', *Journal of General Management*, 24 pp.22-37

Dex, S. and Ward, H. (2007). Parental Care and Employment in Early Childhood. Working Paper 7. London: Equal Opportunities Commission.

Dex, S. and Ward, K. (2010). Employment trajectories and ethnic diversity. In K. Hansen, H. Joshi and S. Dex (eds.), *Children of the 21st Century: the first five years*. Bristol: the Policy Press.

Dillaway and Pare` (2008) 'Locating Mothers: How Cultural Debates About Stay-at-Home Versus Working Mothers Define Women and Home'. *Journal of Family Issues* 29 (4) 437-464.

Donaldson, M. (1993). 'What is hegemonic masculinity?' *Theory and Society*, 22(5), pp.643-657.

Doucet, A. (1998) 'Interpreting Mother-Work: Linking Ontology, Theory, Methodology and Personal Biography'. *Canadian Woman Studies* 18, pp. 52-58.

Doucet, A. (2006) *Do Men Mother?* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Drew, P. Raymond, G and Weinberg, D. (2006) *Talk and Interaction in Social Research Methods*. London: Sage.

Driver, S. and Martell, L. (2002) 'New Labour, Work and Family' *Social Policy and Administration*, 36 (1) pp.46-61.

Du Gay, P. (1996) *Consumption and work identities*. California: Sage

Eby, L. Casper, W., Lockwood, A., Bordeaux, C and Brinley, A. (2005). 'Work and family research in IO/ OB: Content analysis and review of the literature (1980 – 2002). *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 66, pp.124-197.

Edgell, S. (2012) *The Sociology of Work*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed) London: Sage.

Edley, N. (2001) 'Analysing Masculinity: Interpretive Repertoires, Ideological Dilemmas and Subject Positions . In Wetherell, M. Taylor, S and Yates, S.J. (eds) *Discourse Theory and practice: A Reader*. London: Sage, pp. 189-228

- Edwards, D. (1995) 'Sacks and Psychology' *Theory and Psychology*. 5 pp579 - 596.
- Edwards, D. (2007) 'Managing subjectivity in talk' In Hepburn, A. and Wiggins, S. (Eds) *Discursive Research in Practice: New Approaches to Psychology and Interaction* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp31 -50.
- Edwards, R. and Gillies, V. (2012) 'Farewell to Family?' *Families, Relationships and Societies*, 1,(1) pp. 63-69(7). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Edwards, J. and Wacjman, P. (2005) *The Politics of Working Life*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ehrenreich B and Hochschild, A. R., (2003) *Global woman: nannies, maids and sex workers in the new economy*. London : Granta Books.
- Employment Relations Act (1999) London: HMSO
- Employment Relations Act (2004) London: HMSO
- Employment Rights Act (1996) London: HMSO
- Emslie, C. and Hunt K. (2009) 'Live to work' or 'work to live'? A qualitative study of gender and work-life balance among men and women in mid-life'. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 16 pp.151-72.
- Equality and Human Rights Commission (2009a). *Working better: meeting the needs of families, workers and employers in the 21st century*. London: Equalities and Human Rights Commission.
- Equality and Human Rights Commission (2009b). *Working Better: fathers, family and work contemporary perspectives. Research summary 41*. London: Equality and Human Rights Commission.
- European Industrial Relations Observatory on-line (1998) *The EU parental leave agreement and Directive: Implications for national law and practice*. [Online] [Accessed on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2013] <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/1998/01/study/tn9801201s.htm>
- Ellison, G., Barker, A., and Kulasuriya, T. (2009). *Work and care: a study of modern parents*, London: Equality and Human Rights Commission.
- Fairclough, N. (2001) *The Discourse of New Labour: Critical Discourse Analysis*. In Wetherell, M. Taylor, S and Yates, S.J. (eds) *Discourse Theory and practice: A Reader*. London: Sage, pp. 229-266

Fatherhood Institute (2008) *Main Research Summary: the Costs and Benefits of Active Fatherhood* [Online] [Accessed on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2013] <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2008/fatherhood-institute-main-research-summary-the-costs-and-benefits-of-active-fatherhood/>

Fatherhood Institute (2010) *The Fatherhood Report 2010-2011*. Abergavenny: The Fatherhood Institute. [Online] [Accessed on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2013] [http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/FI-FiFI-Report-2010\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/FI-FiFI-Report-2010_FINAL.pdf)

Fatherhood Institute (2011) *Research summary: Fathers, mothers, work and family* [Online] [Accessed on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2013] <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2011/fi-research-summary-fathers-mothers-work-and-family/>

Featherstone, Brid (2004) *Family life and family support: a feminist analysis*. Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan.

Featherstone, B. (2009) *Contemporary fathering: theory, policy and practice*. Bristol : Policy.

Featherstone, Brid (2010) *Gender and child welfare in society*. Oxford : Wiley-Blackwell 2010.

Featherstone, B and Trinder, L. (2001) 'New Labour, families and *fathers*' *Critical Social policy* 12. (4) pp.534-536

Featherstone, Bríd; Hollway, Wendy, (1997) *Mothering and ambivalence*. London : Routledge

Fine, C. (2010) *Delusions of Gender*. London: Icon Books.

Fine, M. (1994) 'Working the hyphens: Reinventing self and other in qualitative research.' In Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Sage, Thousand Oaks, California, pp. 70–82.

Finn, M. and Henwood, K. (2009). 'Exploring masculinities within men's identificatory imaginings of first time fatherhood'. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 48(3) pp. 547-562.

Fontana, A. and Frey, J. (2008) 'The interview.' In Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.) *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Methods*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed) Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, pp. 115–160.

Forster, M. (2002) *Good Wives?* London: Vintage

Foucault, M. (1972). *Archaeology of knowledge*. New York: Pantheon.

Foucault (1977) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison*. Harmondsworth: Penguin

Foucault, M. (1988) 'Critical theory / intellectual theory', interview with Gerard Raulet, in Kritzman, L. (ed) *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and other writings, 1977 – 1984*, London: Routledge, pp.20-47.

Fox B (2001) The formative years: How parenthood creates gender. *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 28(4) pp. 373–390.

Betty Friedan, (1963) *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1963),

Fuss, D, (1989) *Essentially speaking: feminism, nature and difference*. London : Routledge.

Gabb, J. (2011) 'Family Lives and Relational Living: Taking Account of Otherness', *Sociological Research Online*, 16, (4) [Online] [Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> October 2013]  
<http://www.socresonline.org.uk/16/4/10.html>

Gatrell, C (2005) *Hard Labour: The Sociology of Parenthood*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gatrell, C. (2007) 'Secrets and lies: Breastfeeding and professional paid work'. *Social Science and Medicine* 65, pp.393 - 404.

Gatrell, C (2008) *Embodying Women's Work*. Berkshire: Open University Press.

Gambles, R., Lewis, S., and Rapoport, R. (2006). *The myth of work-life balance*. West Sussex: Wiley.

Gee, J.P. (2005). *An Introduction to discourse*. (2nd ed). London: Routledge.

Gergen, K.L. (2009) *An Invitation to Social Construction*. (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed) London: Sage.

Gergen,M and Gergen, K.L. (2008) *Social Construction: A Reader*. London: Sage.

Gergen, M. (2013) 'Feminist Social Constructionism' *Psychology's feminist voices interview series* [Online] [Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> September 2013]  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e0x3ByETqWI>

Gerson, K. (2004) Understanding work and family through a gender lens, *Community, Work and Family*, 7 (2) pp.163-178

Gerson, K. (2009) 'Changing Lives, Resistant Institutions: A New Generation Negotiates Gender, Work, and Family Change.' *Sociological Forum* 24, pp.735-53.



- Gillies, V. (2005) 'Meeting parents' needs? Discourses of 'support' and 'inclusion' in family policy'. *Critical Social Policy* 25 pp.70 - 90
- Gillies, V. (2006) *Marginalised mothers: exploring working class experiences of parenting*. London : Routledge
- Glover, J. and Kirton, G. (2006) *Women, employment and organizations*. London: Routledge.
- Goffman, E. (1976) 1976. 'Gender Display'. *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication* 3 pp.69-77.
- Goodley, D. and Smailes, S. (2011) 'Positionalities'. In Banister, P., Bunn, G. Burman, E., Daniels, J., Duckett, P., Goodley, D, Lawthom, R., Parker, I., Runswick-Cole, K., Sixsmith, J., Smailes, S., Tindall, C. and Wheelan, P. (Eds.) (2011) *Qualitative Methods in Psychology: A Research Guide*. Berkshire: Open University Press.
- Gramsci, A. (1971) *Selections from the prison notebooks*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Greenhaus, J. and Singh, R. (2003, February 25). *Work-Family Linkages, A Sloan Work and Family Encyclopedia Entry*. Chestnut Hill, MA: Boston College. [Online] [Accessed on 5th April 2009 <https://workfamily.sas.upenn.edu/glossary/w/work-family-balance-definitions-0>
- Greenhaus, J.H., and Allen, T. (2011). 'Work-family balance: A review and extension of the literature'. In J.C. Quick and L.E. Tetrick (Eds.), *Handbook of occupational health psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 165-183). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association
- Gregory, A. and Milner, S. (2008) 'Fatherhood regimes and father involvement in France and the UK'. *Community, Work and Family*, 11 (1), pp. 61-84.
- Gregory, A. and Milner, S. (2009). 'Editorial: Work-life Balance: A Matter of Choice?' *Gender Work and Organization*, 16 (1), pp. 1-13.
- Grzywacz and Tucker (2008) *Work-Family Experiences and Physical Health: A Summary and Critical Review*. Winston: Salem: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and Sloan Foundation. [Online] [Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> December 2013] <https://workfamily.sas.upenn.edu/wfrn-repo/object/wp2j1yg3b51iq40j>
- Gunter, H. (2013) 'Knowledge and knowing in leadership' *The Unequal Academy*, Fairness at Work Research Centre, Manchester: The University of Manchester: June 5<sup>th</sup> 2013



- Gutting, G. (2005) *Foucault: A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Halford, S., Savage, M. and Witz, A. (1997) *Gender, Careers and Organisations*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Hall, S. (2001) *Foucault: Power, Knowledge and Discourse*. In Wetherell, M. Taylor, S and Yates, S.J. (eds) *Discourse Theory and practice: A Reader*. London: Sage, pp. 300-317
- Hammersley, M. (2013) 'On Ethical Principles of Social Research' Key note paper presented at: 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Research Institute of Health and Social Change Conference. Manchester, UK, 4th July 2013. [Online] [Available 15<sup>th</sup> December 2013] <http://vimeo.com/81097238>
- Hansen, K, Joshi, H. and Dex, S. (2010) *Children of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Bristol: Policy Press
- Hantrais, L. (2004) *Family Policy Matters: Responding to Family Change in Europe*. Bristol: Policy Press
- Haraway, D. (1988) 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective'. *Feminist Studies*. 14 (3) pp. 575-599.
- Hardy, M.A. and Bryman, A (Eds) *Handbook of Data Analysis*. London: Sage.
- Hartmann, H. (1976) 'Capitalism, Patriarchy and Job Segregation by Sex'. In Jackson and Scott (2002) *Gender: A Sociological Reader*. London: Routledge. Pp.97-111.
- Haunschild, A; Eikhof, D. R; Warhurst, C. (2008) *Work less, live more?: a critical analysis of the work-life boundary*. New York : Palgrave Macmillan.
- Huari, H., and Hollingworth, K. (2009). *Understanding fathering. Masculinity, diversity and change*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Hays, S. (1998) *The Cultural contradictions of motherhood*. Yale University: Yale University Press.
- Hearn, J. (2004) 'From hegemonic masculinity to the hegemony of men'. *Feminist Theory*, 5(1) pp.49-72.
- Henwood, K. L., Finn, M., and Shirani, F. (2008). Use of visual methods to explore parental identities in historical time and social change: Reflections from the men-as-fathers project. *Qualitative Researcher*, 9, pp.112-115.
- Hicks, S. (2006) 'Maternal Men—Perverts and Deviants? Making Sense of Gay Men as Foster Carers and Adopters'. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 2(1) pp.993–114.

Hirsch, D and Miller, J. (2004) *Labour's welfare reform: progress to date*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation. [Online] [Accessed on 12th January 2013] <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/labour%E2%80%99s-welfare-reform-progress-date>

Hochschild, A. R. with Machung, A. (1990) *The Second Shift: working parents and the revolution at home*. London: Piatkus

Hodges, M.J. and Budig, M.J. (2010) 'Who Gets the Daddy Bonus?: Organizational Hegemonic Masculinity and the Impact of Fatherhood on Earnings.' *Gender and Society* 24 pp.717-745.

Holmes, M. (2009) *Gender and Everyday Life*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Hollway, W. (1994) 'Beyond Sex Differences: A Project for Feminist Psychology', *Feminism and Psychology* 4(4) pp.538-46.

Hooker, H., Neathey, F., Casebourne, J. and Munro, M. (2006), *The Third Work-Life Balance Employees' Survey*, London: Department of Trade and Industry.

Hooks, b. (1989) *Talking back: thinking feminist, thinking black*. Boston: South End Press.

Horton-Salway, M. (2001) *The Construction of M.E.: The Discursive Action Model*. In Wetherell, M. Taylor, S and Yates, S.J. (eds) *Discourse as Data: A guide to analysis*. London: Sage pp147-188

Howitt, D. (2010) *Introduction to Qualitative Methods in Psychology*. Essex: Pearson Educational Limited.

Hutchby, I., and Wooffitt, R. (1998). *Conversation analysis: Principles, practices and applications*. Oxford: Polity Press.

Hutchby, I. (2001) 'Researching Psychic Practitioners: Conversation Analysis'. In Wetherell, M. Taylor, S and Yates, S.J. (eds) *Discourse as Data: A guide to analysis*. London: Sage pp49-92

Inglis, D. (2012) *An Invitation to Social Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Institute of Fiscal Studies (2011) *Poverty and Inequality in the UK*. London: HMSO.

Irving, H. (2008) *Gender and the Constitution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

James, O. (2007) *Affluenza*. London: Vermillion.

Jackson and Scott (2002) *Gender: A Sociological Reader*. London: Routledge.

- Jacobs, S. (2012) 'Neoliberalism and gender' Key note paper presented at: *Institute of Humanities and Social Science Research Neoliberalism Conference*. Manchester, UK, 6th June 2013.
- Jagger, G. (2008) *Judith Butler: sexual politics, social change and the power of performance*. Abingdon: Routledge
- Jefferson, G. (1990) 'List construction as a task and resource', In Psathas, G. (ed) *Interaction Competence*, Lanham: University Press of America pp. 63-93.
- John, P. (2011) *Making Policy Work*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Johnson S, Burrows A, Williamson I. (2004) 'Does my bump look big in this?' The meaning of bodily changes for first-time mothers-to-be'. *Journal of Health Psychology*. 9(3) pp.361-74.
- Jones, P. Bradbury, L. and Le Boutillier, S. (2011) *Introducing Social Theory* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed) Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Josselson, R. (2013) *Interviewing for Qualitative Inquiry*. New York: Guildford Press.
- Kahu, E.R., and Morgan, M. (2007). A critical discourse analysis of New Zealand government policy: Women as mothers and workers. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 30, pp.134-146.
- Kessler, S.J. and McKenna, W. (1978) *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- King, M. (In Press) 'Imprisoned in a System of Work, Produce, Consume': So how did Jack Kerouac, Hugh Hefner, Albert Finney and John Lennon Challenge the Link between Masculinity and Responsibility?' In Glapka, E. *Gender under Construction: Femininities and Masculinities in Context*, Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press.
- Lawthom, R. (1999) 'Using the 'F' word in organizational psychology: foundations for critical feminist research'. *Annual Review of Critical Psychology*. 1 pp. 65-78.
- Lawthom, R. and Tindall, C. (2011) 'Positionalities'. In Banister, P., Bunn, G. Burman, E., Daniels, J., Duckett, P., Goodley, D, Lawthom, R., Parker, I., Runswick-Cole, K., Sixsmith, J., Smailes, S., Tindall, C. and Wheelan, P. (Eds.) (2011) *Qualitative Methods in Psychology: A Research Guide*. Berkshire: Open University Press pp.3-21
- Lazar, M. (2007) 'Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Articulating a Feminist Discourse, Praxis' *Critical Discourse Studies*. 4, ( 2) pp. 141–164.

Letherby, G. (2003) *Feminist Research in Theory and Practice*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Lewis, J. and Campbell, M (2007a) 'UK work/family balance policies and gender equality, 1997–2005' *Social politics: international studies in gender, state and society*, 14 (1). Pp.4-30.

Lewis, J. and Campbell, M. (2007b) 'Work/family balance policies in the UK since 1997: a new departure?' *Journal of social policy*, 36 (3). pp.365-381.

Lewis, J. and Campbell, M. (2008) What's in a name?: 'work and family' or 'work and life' balance policies in the UK since 1997 and the implications for the pursuit of gender equality' *Social policy and administration*, 42 (5) pp. 524–541

Lewis, J. and Giullari, S. (2005) 'The adult worker model family, gender equality and care: The search for new policy principles and the possibilities and problems of a capabilities approach'. *Economy and society*, 34 (1). pp. 76- 104

Lewis, S. (1997) "Family Friendly' Employment Policies: A Route to Changing Organizational Culture or Playing About at the Margins?' *Gender, Work and Organization*, 4 (1) pp. 13–23,

Lewis, S. den Dulk, L. (2008) 'Parents' experiences of flexible work arrangements in changing European workplaces' *Sociological Problems* 6 pp.5-28.

Lewis, S., and Cooper. C.L (2005). *Work-Life Integration: case studies of organizational change*. Chichester: John Wiley and Sons

Lewis, S. and Rajn-Rankin, S. (2013) 'Deconstructing "Family Supportive Cultures": A Vision for the Future. In Poelmans, S., Greenhaus, J.H. and Las Heras Maestro, M. (eds.), *Expanding the Boundaries of Work-Family Research: A Vision for the Future*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; pp. 32-69.

Lewis, S. and Smithson, J. (2006) 'Gender, parenthood and the changing European workplace'. *Final Report of the Transitions Project for the EU Framework 5*, Manchester: Manchester Metropolitan University

Lister, R. (1997) *Citizenship: feminist perspectives*. Basingstoke: Macmillan

Locke, A. (2013) "Stay-at-home-dads', masculinity and parenting: Representations of 'fatherhood' in the British Press'. BPS *Psychology of Women Section Annual Conference* 10 July 2013. Cumberland Lodge, Windsor: BPS POWS.

Lupton, D. and Barclay, L. (1997) *Constructing fatherhood: Discourses and Experiences*. London: Sage.

McIlvor, A. (2013) *Working Lives*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

- McLaughlin, K. (2012) *Surviving Identity: Vulnerability and the Psychology of Recognition*, London: Routledge.
- McKie, L. and Callan, S. (2012) *Understanding Families*. London: Sage.
- McKinlay, A and McVittie, C. (2008) *Social psychology and Discourse*. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Marsiglio, William (1995) *Fatherhood: contemporary theory, research and social policy*. London: Sage.
- Marsiglio, W., Amato, P., Day, R.D., and Lamb, M.E., (2000) 'Scholarship on fatherhood in the 1990s and beyond.' *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 62, pp.1173-1191
- Marx Ferree, M. (2010) 'Filling the Glass: Gender Perspectives on Families'. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72 (3) pp.420 -439
- Mason, J. (2009) *Qualitative Researching (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed)* London: Sage.
- Mauthner, M, Birch, M., Jessop, J. and Miller, T. (2008) *Ethics in Qualitative Research. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed )*London: Sage.
- Mauthner, N.S. and Doucet, A. (1998) 'Reflections on a Voice- Centred Relational Method of Data Analysis: Analysing Maternal and Domestic Voices', In Ribbens, J. and Edwards, R (eds.), *Feminist Dilemmas in Qualitative Research: Private Lives and Public Texts*. London: Sage; pp. 119-144.
- Mauthner, N. and Doucet, A. (2003) 'Reflexive Accounts and Accounts of Reflexivity in Qualitative Data Analysis.' *Sociology*, 37 (3) pp.413–431.
- May, T. (2002) *Qualitative Research in Action*. London: Sage Publications.
- May, V. (2004) 'Narrative identity and the re-conceptualization of lone motherhood'. *Narrative Inquiry*, 14 pp.169-189.
- May, V., (2004) 'Meanings of lone motherhood within a broader family context', *Sociological Review*, 52 pp.390-403.
- May, V. (2007) 'The use of mixed methods in a study of residence and contact disputes between divorced and separated parents' *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 10 pp.295-306
- May, V. (2008a) 'On being a 'good' mother: The moral presentation of self' *Sociology* 42: 470-486

- May, V (2008b) 'The presentation of a moral self in personal narratives'. *Vital Signs: Researching Real Life Conference*, Morgan Centre, Manchester UK: The University of Manchester 9 September 2008
- May, V. (2010) 'Lone motherhood as a category of practice', *Sociological Review*, 58(3): 429-443.
- May, V. (2011) 'Changing notions of lone motherhood in 20th century Finland', *Women's History Review*, 20(1) pp.127-143
- May, M. (2001) 'Women and the 'third way': the implications of work-based welfare'. *Critical Social Policy*, 21: pp.522 - 525.
- Maynard, M. and Purvis, J. (eds.)(1994) *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective*. London: Taylor and Francis.
- Medved, C. E. and Rawlins, W. K. (2011). 'At home fathers and breadwinning mothers: Variations in constructing work and family lives'. *Women and Language*, 39, pp.9-39.
- Mill, J.S. (1869) *The Subjection of Women*, London: Longman, Green, reader and Dyer.
- Mills, S. (2003) *Michel Foucault*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Miller, T. (2005) *Making Sense of Motherhood: a narrative approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Miller, T. (2010) *Making Sense of Fatherhood: gender and caring work*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Miller, T. (2011) 'Falling back into Gender? Men's Narratives and Practices around First-time Fatherhood' *Sociology* 45(6) pp.1094-1109
- Miller, T. (2012) Balancing Caring and Paid Work in the UK: Narrating 'Choices' as First-Time Parents. *International Review of Sociology* 22(1) pp.107-120
- Mills, C.W. (2000) *The Sociological Imagination (40th Anniversary ed)* Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Milner, S.(2010). 'Choice' and 'flexibility' in reconciling work and family: towards a convergence in policy discourse on work and family in France and the UK? ' *Policy and Politics*, 38 (1), pp. 3-21.
- Misra,J., Budig, M. and Boeckmann, I. (2011) 'Work-family policies and the effects of children on women's employment hours and wages' *Community, Work and Family*, 14, (2) 139-157

- Moen, P. (2011) 'From 'workfamily' to the 'gendered life course' and 'fit': five challenges to the field' *Community, Work and Family*, 14 (1) pp.81-96
- Moore, M. R. (2012) Intersectionality and the Study of Black, Sexual Minority Women'. *Gender and Society* pp.33-39.
- Morgan, D. (1996) *Family Connections*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Moss, P. (ed) International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research 2011. London: Institute of Education, University of London.
- National Family and Parenting Institute (2003) *Work and the Family Today: An at-a-glance Guide*. NFPI Factsheet 3: NFPI.
- Nicholson, L.J. (1990) *Feminism / Postmodernism*, London: Routledge.
- O'Brien, M. (2003) *Working fathers: Earning and Caring*. Manchester: EOC.
- O'Brien, M. (2004). *Shared Caring: bringing fathers into the frame. Working Paper Series No 18*. London: Equal Opportunities Commission.
- O'Brien, M. (2005) *Shared Caring: Bringing fathers into the frame*. Manchester: Equal Opportunities Commission Working Paper Series.
- O'Brien, M., Brandth, B., and Kvande, El. (2007). Fathers, work and family life: global perspectives and new insights', *Community, Work and Family*, 10(4) pp.375–386.
- O'Brien, M. and Philip, G. (2012) 'Supporting fathers after separation or divorce: evidence, interventions and insights' Keynote paper presented at *Research Seminar and Report Launch: Supporting Fathers after separation or divorce* Friends House, London University of East Anglia. 18 October 2012,
- O'Brien, M. and I. Shemilt (2003). *Working fathers: earning and caring*. London: Equal Opportunities Commission.
- O'Byrne, R., Rapley, M., and Hansen, S. (2006). You couldn't say "no", could you?': Young men's understandings of sexual refusal. *Feminism and Psychology*, 16, 133-154.
- Oakley, A, (1972) *Sex, Gender and Society*. London: Temple-Smith.
- Oakley, A. (1974) *Housewife*. Middlesex: Penguin Books.
- Oakley, A. (2005) *The Ann Oakley Reader*. Middlesex: Penguin Books
- OECD (2007), *Babies and Bosses - Reconciling Work and Family Life: A Synthesis of Findings for OECD Countries*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

OECD (2010) *Gender Brief March 2010*. Paris: OECD Publishing. [Online] [Accessed on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2013] <http://www.oecd.org/els/family/44720649.pdf>

OECD (2011) *Doing Better for Families*. Paris: OECD Publishing

Office for National Statistics (2002) *Labour Market Trends*. 110 (9) pp. 445 – 492. London: HMSO

Office for National Statistics (26<sup>th</sup> September 2008) *Focus on Gender*. London: HMSO

Office for National Statistics (2011) *Mothers in the Labour Market*

Office of National Statistics (2011) *Neighbourhood Statistics*. <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/LeadTableView.do?a=3&b=6275288&c=Trafford&d=13&e=61&g=6347311&i=1001x1003x1032x1004&m=0&r=1&s=1377611833701&enc=1&dsFamilyId=2496> [Online] [Accessed on 11 December 2011]

Office for National Statistics (2011) 'Households and Families' *Social Trends 41*,. London: HMSO. [Online] [Accessed on 11<sup>th</sup> August 2013] <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/social-trends-rd/social-trends/social-trends-41/social-trends-41---household-and-families.pdf>.

Park, A., Clery, E., Curtice, J., Phillips, M. and Utting, D. (eds.) (2012), *British Social Attitudes: the 29th Report*, London: NatCen Social Research, [Online] [Accessed on 11<sup>th</sup> August 2013] [www.bsa-29.natcen.ac.uk](http://www.bsa-29.natcen.ac.uk)

Parker, I. (1992) *Discourse Dynamics: Critical Analysis for Social and Individual Psychology*. London: Routledge.

Parsons, T. (1964) *The Social System*. Abdingdon: Routledge Kegan Paul Ltd

Parsons and Bale (1956) *Family Socialization and Interaction Process*. London: Routledge Kegan Paul.

Pelias, R.J. (2009) 'Pledging Personal Allegiance to Qualitative Inquiry'. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 2, (3) pp.351 – 356.

Philip, G (2013) 'Extending the analytical lens': a consideration of the concepts of 'care' and 'intimacy' in relation to fathering after separation or divorce, *Sociological Research Online*, 18 (1) [Online] [Accessed on 9th Decmeber 2013] <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/18/1/15.html>

Pillay (2009) 'Academic mothers finding rhyme and reason'. *Gender and Education* 21 (5) pp.501-515.



Pomerantz, Anita M. 1984. 'Giving a source or basis: The practice in conversation of telling "how I know".' *Journal of Pragmatics* 8 pp.607-625.

Pomerantz, Anita M. 1986. 'Extreme Case formulations: A way of legitimizing claims', *Human Studies* 9 pp.219-229.

Potter, J. (1996). *Representing reality: Discourse, rhetoric, and social construction*. London: Sage.

Potter, J. (2004) 'Discourse Analysis' In *Handbook of Data Analysis* Hardy, M.A. and Bryman, A. (eds) London: Sage. pp. 607-624

Potter, J. (2012) 'How to study experience'. *Discourse and Society*, 23, pp.576-588.

Potter, J. (2012). 'Re-reading Discourse and Social Psychology: Transforming social psychology', *British Journal of Social Psychology* 51, pp436-455.

Potter, J. and Wetherell, M., (1987) *Discourse and Social Psychology*. London: Sage.

Potter, J. and Wetherell, M., (1995) 'Discourse analysis', In Smith, J., Harré, R., van Langenhove, R., (Eds), *Rethinking Methods in Psychology*, London; Sage pp80-92.

Pratesi, A., and Runswick-Cole, K. (2011) 'Not so usual families: overlaps and divergence in the practices of care within disabled and same-sex families', *International Journal of Sociology of Families*, 37(2): pp. 243-262

Prince Cooke, L. (2011) *Gender-Class Equality in Political Economies*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Raddon, A. (2002) 'Discourses of the 'successful academic' and the 'good mother'', *Studies in Higher Education*, 27 (4) pp.387-403

Rapoport, R., Bailyn, L., Fletcher, J., and Pruitt, B.H. (2002). *Beyond work-family balance: Advancing gender equity and workplace performance*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Ramsay, K. and G. Letherby, G. (2006) 'The Experience of Academic Non-Mothers in the Gendered University', *Gender, Work and Organisation* 13.1 pp.25-44

- Reynolds, J. (2008) *The Single Women: A Discursive Investigation*. East Sussex: Routledge
- Richardson, L. and Durose, C. (2013) *Who is accountable in localism?* Birmingham: University of Birmingham
- Roper, S. and Capdevila, R. (2010) 'We are a real family': A Q methodological study on the experiences of stepmothers. *Radical Psychology*, 9, ( 2)
- Rowbotham, S. (2012) 'Dreamers of a new day: British and American women's alternative economic visions in the late 19th and early 20th centuries' *The 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Frow Lecture at The Working Class Movement Library* 28 April 2012 Salford: University of Salford, UK.
- Rowbotham, S. (2010) *Dreamers of a New Day: Women Who Invented the 20th Century*. London: Verso.
- Rowbotham, S., Segal, L. and Wainwright, Hilary (2013). *Beyond the fragments : feminism and the making of socialism*. London: Merlin Press
- Ruddick, S. (1990) *Maternal thinking: towards a politics of peace*. London: Women's Press 1990.
- Runswick-Cole K.A., Goodley D.A. (2011) 'Problematising policy: conceptions of 'child', 'disabled' and 'parents' in social policy in England' *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 15 (1) pp.71-85.
- Sallee, M.W. and Harris, F. (2011) 'Gender performance in Qualitative Studies of masculinities'. *Qualitative Research* 11 (4) pp.409-429.
- Sacks, H. (1992). *Lectures on Conversation, Volumes I and II* Jefferson, G. (ed) Oxford: Blackwell.
- Sacks, H. (1984) "On doing 'being ordinary'" In J.M. Atkinson and J. Heritage (eds) *Structure of social action studies in conversation analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Saukko, P. (2008) *The Anorexic Self*, New York: State University of New York Press
- Saul, J.M. (2003) *Feminism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Sayer, L.C. and Gornick, J.C. (2012) 'Cross-National Variation in the Influence of Employment Hours on Child Care Time'. *European Sociological Review* 28(4), pp. 421-442.
- Scott, J. W. (1999) *Gender and Politics of History*. New York: Colombia University Press.

Scott, J.W. (1994) 'Deconstructing equality-versus-difference: Or, the uses of poststructuralist theory for feminism'. In Seidman, S. (1994) *The Postmodern turn: new perspectives on social theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Segal, Lynne (1983). *What is to be done about the family?* Harmondsworth: Penguin in association with the Socialist Society.

Seidman, S. (1994) *The Postmodern turn: new perspectives on social theory*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.

Sevenhuijsen, S (1998) *Citizenship and the Ethics of Care*, London: Routledge.

Seward, R.R., and Richter, R. (2008). 'International research on fathering: an expanding horizon'. *Fathering*, 6(2) pp.87-91

Sevón, E. (2005) 'Timing Motherhood: Experiencing and Narrating the Choice to Become a Mother.' *Feminism and Psychology*, 15 (4) pp. 461- 482.

Sheldon, C. (2013) 'Open Policy Making, Evidence and Our Place' *Interactive Academic Engagement with Policy Stakeholders: Knowledge Exchange Trials. Civil Society: Mobilising Communities to Take-Up Localism Rights* at The University of Manchester, Manchester UK, 11 December 2013.

Sigle-Rushton,W. and Kenney, C. (2004) Public Policy and Families. In Scott, J., Treas, J and Richards, M. (eds) *Sociology of the Family*. Oxford: Blackwells, pp.457-477.

Sims-Schouten, W., Riley, S. andWillige, C. (2007) 'Critical realism in discourse analysis: a presentation of a systematic method of analysis using women's talk of motherhood, childcare and female employment as an example. *Theory and Psychology* 17 (1) pp. 127 -150

Skeggs, B. (1997) *Formations of Class and Gender*. London: Sage.

Skeggs, B. (2013) 'Values Beyond Value? Is Anything Beyond the Logic of Capital?' *The British Journal of Sociology* 2013 annual public lecture at London School of Economics, London, 18th October 2013,

Smart, C. and May, V. (2004) 'Why can't they agree: the underlying complexity of contact and residence disputes', *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, 2004, 26(4): 1-14

Smart, C, Neale, B and Wade, A (2001) *The Changing Experience of Childhood; Families and Divorce*, London: John Wiley and Sons.

Smart, C., and Shipman, B. (2004). 'Visions in monochrome: families, marriage and the individualization thesis'. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 55(4), pp.491-509.

Smart, C (2007) *Personal Life*, Cambridge: Polity.

Smeaton, D., and Marsh, A. (2006). Maternity and Paternity Rights and Benefits: Survey of Parents 2005. *Employment Relations Research Series* No. 50. Department of Trade and Industry.

Smithson, J. and Stokoe, E.H. (2001) 'Making gender relevant: Conversational analysis and gender categories in interaction'. *Discourse and Society*, 12 (2) pp.243-269.

Smithson, J. and Stokoe, E.H. (2005) 'Discourses of Work-Life Balance: Negotiating 'Genderblind' Terms in Organisations'. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 12 (2) pp.147-168.

Smock, P.J., and Greenland, F.R. (2010). 'Diversity in pathways to parenthood: Patterns, implications and emerging research directions. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72, 576-593.

Social Research Association (2003) Ethical Guidelines. [Online] [Accessed on 21st September 2008] <http://the-sra.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/ethics03.pdf>

Speer, S.A. (2007). 'On recruiting conversation analysis for critical realist purposes'. *Theory and Psychology*, 17, 125-135.

Stanley, L. and Wise, S. (1993) *Breaking out again: feminist ontology and epistemology*. London: Routledge

Steedman, C. (2005) London: Virago Press.

Tanaka, S., and Waldfogel, J. (2007). Effects of parental leave and working hours on fathers' involvement with their babies: Evidence from the UK Millennium Cohort Study. *Community, Work and Family*, 10(4) pp.409-426.

Tannen, D. (2001) *The Relativity of Linguistic Strategies: Rethinking Power and Solidarity in Gender and Dominance..* In Wetherell, M. Taylor, S and Yates, S.J. (eds) *Discourse Theory and practice: A Reader*. London: Sage, pp. 150-166

Taylor, S. (2001). 'Locating and conducting discourse analytic research'. In M. Wetherell., S. Taylor. and S. Yates. (2001). *Discourse as data: Guide for analysis*. London: Sage.

Thomson, R., Kehily, M.J, Hadfield, L. and Sharpe, S. (2011) *Making Modern Mothers*, Bristol: Policy Press.

*The Oxford Popular English Dictionary* (2010) Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Trinder, L. (2012) 'Ways forward to support fathers after separation or divorce', Keynote paper presented at *Research Seminar and Report Launch: Supporting Fathers after separation or divorce*, Friends House, London University of East Anglia. 18 October 2012,
- Twigg, J. (2006) *The Body in Health and Social Care*. Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Van Dijk, T. (2001) *Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis*. In Wetherell, M. Taylor, S and Yates, S.J. (eds) *Discourse Theory and practice: A Reader*. London: Sage, pp. 300-317
- Wager, M. (2000). 'Childless by choice? ambivalence and the female identity' *Feminism and Psychology*, 10 (3) pp.389-395.
- Wall, G. and Arnold, S. (2007) 'How Involved Is Involved Fathering? An Exploration of the Contemporary Culture of Fatherhood' *Gender and Society* 21(4) pp. 508-527
- Warin, J., Solomon, Y., Lewis, C., and Langford, W. (1999). *Fathers, work and family life*. London: Family Policy Studies Centre and Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- West, C. and Fenstermaker, S. (1995) 'Doing Difference'. *Gender and Society*, 9 (1) pp. 8-37
- West, C. and Zimmerman, D. (1987) 'Doing Gender' *Gender and Society*, Vol. 1, No. 2. (Jun., 1987), pp. 125-151
- Wetherell, M. Taylor, S and Yates, S.J. (eds) (2001a) *Discourse Theory and practice: A Reader*. London: Sage.
- Wetherell, M. Taylor, S and Yates, S.J. (eds) (2001b) *Discourse as Data: A guide to analysis*. London: Sage.
- Wetherell, M. (1998) 'Positioning and interpretive repertoires: conversation analysis and post-structuralism in dialogue'. *Discourse and Society*, 9 pp. 387-412 .
- Wharton, A. (2005) *The Sociology of Gender*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Whitehead, S.M. and Barrett, F.J. (Eds) *The Masculinities Reader* Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Williams, F. (2004) *Rethinking Families*. London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation
- Williams, J.C. (2006) One sick child away from being fired: The Center for Work-Life Law Report, University of California: Hastings College of the Law

- Williams, J.C. (2010) *Reshaping the Work-Family Debate*. Harvard Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Willig, C. (2008) 'Discourse analysis'. In Smith, J. A. Smith (ed) *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods*, London: Sage. pp. 160-185
- Willig, C. (2012) *Qualitative Interpretation and Analysis in Psychology*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Willig, C. (2013) *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Maidenhead: Open Univesrity Press.
- Willott, S., and Griffin, C. (1997) 'Wham bam, am I a man? Unemployed men talk about masculinities'. *Feminism and Psychology*, 7, 107-128.
- Wooffitt, R. (2005) *Conversation analysis and discourse analysis: a comparative and critical introduction*. London : SAGE Publications
- Woollett, A, Lloyd, E. and Phoenix, A. (1991) *Motherhood: meanings, practices and ideologies*. London : Sage Publications
- Work and Families Act (2006) London: HMSO
- Working Families. (2010). *Returning to work: A guide for parents*. [Online] [Accessed on May 26, 2010] from <http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/admin/uploads/Returntowork-parents.pdf>
- Yarwood G. A. (2011). 'The Pick and Mix of Fathering Identities'. *Fathering: A Journal of Theory, Research, and Practice about Men as Fathers*.9 (2) pp.150-168
- Yarwood, G. A. (2013) "Talking about the Personal", *Families, Relationships and Societies*, 2 (3) pp. 441-455.
- Zalewski. M. (2000) *Feminism after postmodernism*. London: Routledge.

## Appendix one: Consent Form

### A study exploring working parent's talk about their experiences of integrating Work and Family

My name is Gemma Yarwood. I am a lecturer undertaking PhD research whilst working at Manchester Metropolitan University. The contact details of my supervisor are as follows: Carol Tindall 0161 247 2554.

I would like to interview you about being a working parent and your everyday experiences of integrating work and family life. Overleaf is an information sheet with some of the topics / questions I am hoping you will talk to me about. I am expecting the maximum interview length to be 1 hour. I will be using a dictaphone to record and transcribe the interview. Some of the things you do and tell me may be published in my thesis and in academic journals. No real names will be used and I will do my utmost to protect your anonymity and privacy protected. Your participation will be voluntary. It has been assessed that there are no foreseeable risks. You can withdraw from the research at any time without reason.

To safeguard the information I collect during my time with you, it will be stored securely in a locked cabinet and once complete, will be destroyed. This is a written consent form.

Name

Postcode

Email Address

Your Confidential No\_\_\_ \_\_ (all other records will only show this number).

*I confirm that I understand the information and the purpose of the research*

*I have been made aware that I should not experience any discomfort.*

*I understand that my agreement to participate in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving any reason.*

*I understand that if the interviews are transcribed, I will be offered a copy to keep.*

*I understand that I will not be identified from the information I give when published in my research thesis and academic journals.*

*I confirm that I have received no financial reward for my participation in this study.*

Participant's Signature..... Date.....

Researcher's Signature:.....Date.....

**Please do not hesitate to contact us if you need further details.**

Researcher- Gemma Yarwood [g.yarwood@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:g.yarwood@mmu.ac.uk) 0161 247 2509 (Work)  
07984209880

Supervisor Carol Tindall [c.tindall@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:c.tindall@mmu.ac.uk)

## **Appendix Two: Interview Schedule Information Sheet for Participants**

**Some the topics / questions I am hoping you will talk to me about include:-**

How old is your child/children?

What type of paid employment do you have and do you have a typical working week?

How do you organise work and family commitments in terms of time etc?

Did you take maternity/paternity leave?

What words would you use to describe what being a mum / dad means to you?

Could you tell me about your weekly child care and working arrangements?



## **Appendix Three: Participant Profiles**

### **Michala**

Michala was a 30 year old white British woman. Michala worked full-time as a care professional. She said, after leaving school, she had worked hard to gain qualifications up to degree level. She was cohabiting with her partner, Jake (see below). They lived within a 5 mile radius of both her parents and Jake's extended family. Her two year old daughter, Libby, attended playgroup in the mornings. In the afternoons, both Jake and her grandparents cared for Libby until Michala came home from work.

Michala chose to be interviewed at home on a week night after work when Libby was in bed. The interview lasted an hour. Jake went to the shop for milk as we started the interview. He returned an hour later for his own interview.

### **Jake**

Jake was a 33 year old white British man. Jake worked part-time in public services. Jake said he didn't like school and never attended college. He was cohabiting with his partner, Michala. They lived within a 5 mile radius Jake's extended family and Michala's parents. Their two year old daughter, Libby, attended playgroup in the mornings. Jake said, he and Michala's parents 'took it in turns' to care for Libby in the afternoons until Michala came home from work.

Jake chose to be interviewed at home on a week night when Libby was in bed. The interview lasted an hour. Jake asked to be interviewed after Michala. Michala was not present during Jake's interview.

## **Rick**

Rick was a 29 year old single (separated from wife), white British man. He worked in retail full-time. He described his job as sales focused with some travelling, by company car, around the North of England to sell specialist goods to professionals. He was educated to college level, saying he liked to learn 'on the job'. He had an 18 month old daughter, Anya, who lived two miles away with her mother (they separated when Anya was 6 months). Rick lived fifty miles from his parents (Anya's grandparents) but he would spend weekends with Anya, often driving with her to his parent's house fifty miles away.

My interview with Rick took place in a coffee shop. We negotiated this location based on proximity between both our workplaces and Rick's home. Rick often referred to his ex-partner in the interview. After the interview (approximately after one hour and the recording had stopped) he thanked me, saying that it was the first time he talked to anyone about his work, family and marital separation since his separation had happened a year ago.

## **Chloe**

Chloe was a 28 year old single black British woman. She described herself as a single parent. She worked part-time in care services whilst studying for a degree. She had twin sons, Callum and Leo, both four years old. She described their care as divided between herself, her family and nursery. She said their father had 'no involvement in their care and limited contact despite living around the corner'.

Chloe chose to be interviewed in my office at work. The interview lasted fifty minutes.

## **Sarah**

Sarah was a 40 year old white British women married to Neil (see below). Sarah had recently left a professional management position to undertake professional degree level training in an alternative field. During this period of retraining, she worked part-time in administration. Her daughter, Jade, was three years old and attended playgroup whilst Sarah studied or worked part-time.

Sarah chose to be interviewed at home (on a week night) after work when Neil was bathing Jade upstairs. The interview lasted an hour.

## **Neil**

Neil was a 43 year old full-time working professional with management responsibilities. He described himself as 'mixed race, dual heritage and being an older dad'. His daughter, Jade, was three years old and attended playgroup whilst Sarah studied or worked part-time. He described undergoing recent medical intervention following 'an organ malfunction but I'm fit again now'.

Neil chose to be interviewed directly after Sarah (his wife). During the interview Sarah was present, either by sitting beside Neil or tidying within earshot. The interview lasted an hour and during this time Sarah contributed by 'chipping in' during points of the interview when she sat next to Neil.

## **Debbie**

Debbie was a 34 year old, white British women working part-time in professional legal services. She had two children, a three year old son, Alex and an eighteen month old daughter, Paige. She said she had enjoyed studying for her university degree before her children were born. She was married to Stan who worked shifts (see below). She lived within 5 miles of her own extended family. Her children attended nursery when Debbie was at work.

Debbie chose to be interviewed at home when the house was 'empty' as her husband and children were out. The interview lasted an hour and a half and Debbie said she enjoyed.

### **Stan**

Stan was a 36 year old, white British man, working full-time shift work in public services. He was married to Debbie (above). They had two children, a three year old son, Alex and an eighteen month old daughter, Paige. Both children went to nursery when Debbie was working. Stan said he had studied up to degree level.

Stan chose to be interviewed in the sitting room of his home whilst Debbie and his children were in the garden. The interview lasted twenty five minutes as he said he was tired.

### **Leila**

Leila was a 32 year old, white British, married woman. She had a three year old son, Ian, and an eighteen month old son, Scott. She said her sons had 'hated nursery so I took them out and do it myself'. She was a part time working care professional who, at the time of the interview, was having difficulty finding a similar new job that was only two days a week.

Leila chose to be interviewed in a coffee shop without her children. We negotiated this location based on proximity between both our workplaces. The interview lasted an hour and ten minutes.

### **Gloria**

Gloria was a 33 year old, white British part-time service sector professional. She had a two year old, Joe, who attended private day nursery. She was married and lived two hundred miles from both her family and her partners.

Gloria chose to be interviewed in a coffee shop on a Sunday whilst her son had a nap in his pram. We negotiated this location based on proximity to her home. The interview lasted forty minutes.

## **Brad**

Brad was a 32 year old white British man. He worked as a full-time scientist which meant some travelling around the country and also some working from home. He had a nine month old daughter, Kate and a wife, Saira. He said 'Kate had bad colic since birth and Saira has been pretty depressed'. He said they had no family living near to help and he did not know when his wife, Saira would go back to work. Brad was retraining to become a teacher via distance learning.

Brad chose to be interviewed in a coffee shop on a Sunday whilst his daughter sat in her pram. We negotiated this location based on proximity to his home. The interview lasted an hour although some this involved baby play as Kate wanted to sit on her daddy's knee.

## **Allana**

Allana was a 30 year old professional white British woman. She worked part-time in the service sector. She had a two year old daughter, Ellie who attended nursery. The nursery was close to both Allana's and her husband's workplace. Allana said they lived 'over one hundred miles from any family'.

Allana chose to be interviewed in the dining area of her workplace. The interview lasted one hour.

## **Tiffany**

Tiffany was a 40 year old white British woman. She described school as 'horrible' and undertook vocational work-based training after school. She worked part-time in the service sector. She was married and had a daughter, Phoenix aged one year old

Tiffany chose to be interviewed in a coffee shop on a Sunday whilst her daughter had a nap in her pram. We negotiated this location based on proximity to her home. The interview lasted forty five minutes.

## **Ivy**

Ivy was a 36 year old white British woman. She worked full-time in professional communication services. She had a one year old son, Rylan and was cohabiting with her partner, Tom. Her son went to a private day nursery full-time. She said she lived in a different country to both her and her husband's family.

Ivy chose to be interviewed at home when her husband and son were out. The interview lasted forty five minutes as she said she was meant to be working from home and needed to send emails to her manager.

## **Appendix Four:**

### **4.1 Sample of Transcript**

GEMMA But generally it's a good thing being a dad?

JAKE Yeah

GEMMA Ok what about when she was younger? Was that easier? Harder?

JAKE Harder. Cos you don't know what's up with them. They can't tell you. She's crying and the only thing she can communicate with me is that she cries..so you got a choice of 4 things. She wants feeding, wants his bum doing, he's got wind or something else. And you've got to pick them out, go through them all. And work out what it is. You do one at time.

GEMMA So when she was a baby it was harder was it? Why was it harder? Apart from the fact it was harder to find out what was wrong. What about how you felt?

JAKE It's your life changing completely.

GEMMA So what was your life like before?

JAKE You could get up, go to work, come home have your tea, go out if you want. You can't do that now can you. You can't plan anything.

GEMMA Right. So generally you feel more responsible?

JAKE Oh yeah you've got to be more responsible.

GEMMA Ok you mention before what you did for a living. How do you work out or organise or plan, you said before it was about planning, how do you plan the hours you are at home with Libby and the hours you work. How do you do that?

## 4.2 The messy realities of discourse analysis.

Here I depict the iterative discourse analysis process with the comments I made using the review menu in Microsoft Word and also handwritten comments.

GEMMA But generally it's a good thing being a dad?

JAKE Yeah.

GEMMA Ok what about when she was younger? Was that easier? Harder?

JAKE Harder. Cos <sup>referring to himself</sup> you don't know what's up with them. They can't tell you. She's crying and the only thing she can communicate with me is that she cries. So you got a choice of 4 things. She wants feeding, wants bum doing, she's got wind or something else. And you've got to pick them out, go through them all. And work out what it is. You do one at time.

Comment [6PM1]: Listing. Intensive caring

GEMMA So when she was a baby it was harder was it? Why was it harder? Apart from the fact it was harder to find out what was wrong.

JAKE <sup>He's meaning his life</sup> It's your life changing completely. You could get up, go to work, come home have your tea, go out if you want. You can't do that now can you. You can't plan anything.

Comment [6Y2]: Does this reflect how other parents feel in terms of their life before and after kids?

Comment [6M3]: Positioning self as sacrificing

GEMMA Right. So generally you feel more responsible now you are a father?

JAKE Oh yeah you've got to be more responsible.

GEMMA Ok you mention before what you did for a living. How do you work out or organise or plan, you said before it was about planning. How do you plan the hours you are at home with Libby and the hours you work. How do you do that? ~

Positioning self as responsible father

Planning  
Repetition  
Is it difficult to reconcile w/ when he can't plan?

Comment [64]: Expresses sacrifice. Do all men do this? Lit I reviewed shows mainly women as primary carers expected to meet intensive care needs of child.



## Appendix Five – Dissemination of study

### A5.1 Policy event



**Interactive Academic Engagement with Policy Stakeholders:  
Knowledge Exchange Trials**

**Civil Society: Mobilising Communities to Take-Up Localism Rights**

**Institute for Social Change and Comparative Public Policy Cluster  
Arthur Lewis Boardroom, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Arthur Lewis Building, University of Manchester**

**Wednesday 11 December, 2013  
Workshop Agenda**

- 10:45            Coffee and registration
- 11:00   **Welcome and context** – Professor Ed Fieldhouse, Professor of Social and Political Science, Institute for Social Change, University of Manchester
- 11:10   **Overview of the policy-making process** – Zamila Bunglawala, Honorary Research Fellow, University of Manchester
- 11:25   **Policy Presentations** –
- Camilla Sheldon, Head of Neighbourhood Community Budgets, Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)
  - Paul McGarry, Senior Strategy Manager, Manchester City Council
  - Gareth Swarbrick, Chief Executive, Rochdale Boroughwide Housing
- 12:30   **Q&A**
- 13:15            Lunch
- 14:15   **Academic Presentations** –
- Professor Peter John, Professor of Political Science and Public Policy, School of Public Policy, University College London
  - Liz Richardson, Senior Lecturer in Politics, University of Manchester
- 15:00   **Q&A**
- 15:45   **Wrap-Up**
- 16:00   **Close**

## **A5.2 Academic Journal Articles**

### **Article One**

Yarwood, G.A. (2011) 'The Pick and Mix of Fathering Identities' In *Fathering*, Vol. 9, No. 2, Spring 2011, pp.150-168. DOI: 10.3149/fth.0902.150

#### **Abstract**

In this paper I ask, how can discursive research illustrate the flexible and negotiated identities of fatherhood? Using accounts from qualitative interviews with nine employed, first time fathers in the United Kingdom, this paper illuminates the complexities of their everyday lives as they try to make sense of dominant discourses of masculinity and fathering. I argue that, fatherhood is dynamic rather than static by presenting discursive analysis of fathering talk. In particular, I critically analyse the hegemonic frames of fathering and masculinity in the UK and the everyday challenges these pose to fathers. I conclude by suggesting that fathers are not cultural dopes but discursive agents, struggling with the institutional norms of fatherhood. Finally I make recommendations for further scholarly research on the fluidity of fathering identities so that it may be embraced rather than side-lined in favour of static normative constructs.

**Keywords:** fathering, identities, discursive research, work-family integration

## Article Two

Yarwood, G. A.(2013) 'Talking about the personal: a pregnant researcher's experience of studying working parents in the UK' In *Families, Relationships and Societies*, Vol 2 (3) pp.441–55 . DOI: 10.1332/204674313X664833.

### Abstract

The relationship between the researcher and researched is an important yet often under-scrutinised topic in family research. This article presents my account of negotiating this complex research relationship. I draw on qualitative interviews with 11 working parents in the United Kingdom. I also consider field notes of my feelings about my research relationships with the participants. In this article I discuss the challenges I faced in developing and managing these relationships. I describe how, as a white woman researcher in my mid-thirties, I became pregnant with my first child during the research process. This influenced the often taken-for-granted assumptions of developing and establishing relationships in research practice. My findings demonstrate the ways in which I was positioned by the participants within and outside mothering discourses based on cultural norms of femininity and heterosexuality. I conclude that it is important to acknowledge the importance of the embodied researcher and the potential impacts on the research process.

**Key words** motherhood • womanhood • discourse • research relationships

### **A5.2.3 Conference Papers**

#### **Paper One**

Yarwood, G.A. (2009) 'In pursuit of work-family harmonisation: Experiences of piecing the jigsaw together'. *Paper presented at: Community, Work and Family 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference, Utrecht, Netherlands, 16 April.*

#### **Abstract**

Individual responsibility of parents to adopt strategies to 'balance' their multiple roles and responsibilities is central to many of the current UK debates on Work-Life integration (May, 2006). The messages from prevailing political discourses appear to suggest that flexible working arrangements can be developed along UK policy guidelines. Choice and individual responsibility to prioritise and manage work and family commitments continue to play a key role in the policy agenda (Brown, 2008). In response, parents and employers are encouraged to adopt more effective working partnerships. This paper wishes to discuss the extent to which this compounds the individualistic and economy driven values of Western society and the socially constructed nature of Work-Life Balance. Recent research by Gambles, Lewis and Rapoport (2006) suggests that Work-Life balance is a myth and challenges us to rethink the place of paid work within the context of our lives. Importantly, individuals, employers and societies need to consider how key family relationships influence the core of our sustainability and wellbeing. This paper considers calls for a shift towards a holistic approach depicting the jigsaw of Work-Family integration.

Drawing on discourse analysis of interviews (Burr, 2003) undertaken during the early stages of PhD research, the paper asks: What can we learn by examining the discursive practices used by parents discussing their experiences of Work-family integration?

## **Paper Two**

Yarwood, G.A. (2010) 'Unlocking and writing up qualitative data, searching for the elusive golden key'. Paper presented at: *Annual Research Institute of Health and Social Change Conference*. Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK. 2 July.

### **Abstract**

This session is aimed at postgraduate students presently faced with the challenges of writing up their qualitative data. It asks, what intellectual and practical strategies are useful when working with such data? I will discuss my own experiences of grappling with ways of making sense of my in-depth interview data. To do this I narrate my personal journey from writers block to something more productive and the ongoing challenges I face in keeping the writing flowing when I prevaricate. Mason (2009) suggests that writing can help to manage masses of qualitative data in ways conducive to theorising. Although this is easier said than done, I aim to share practice examples, allowing us, as a community, to think and write creatively and analytically.

**Keywords:** - Academic writing, PhD, qualitative research,

## Paper Three

Yarwood, G.A. (2012) 'Getting Personal in Work-Family Research: Positionality and Reflexivity'. Paper presented at: *Inaugural Work and Family Researchers Network Conference*. New York City, USA. 14 June.

### Abstract

Parents as research participants in work-family studies are expected to share their experiences of personal and public life. To aid this process of sharing information, researchers must build conducive relationships with their participants. In my own qualitative research into working parents I found that being open about my own biography and personal location influenced the complex research relationship between myself as the researcher and research participants. In this paper I use the concepts of positionality and reflexivity to discuss the challenges I faced navigating the complex research relationships within my study into working parents in the UK. In particular I chart how changes in my own parental status influenced how the research participants positioned me and in turn, the information they shared with me. During my research interviews with working parents with children under 5 years, I found that becoming a parent myself had a significant impact on the interviews. After much reflection I concluded I was being positioned as 'other' in terms of my childless identity (Letherby, 2003). I was positioned as an 'outsider' to the collective identity of parent. This outsider positioning was based on the assumption that I did not share their knowledge and experience of being a parent. In these early stages, before I was a parent, I noticed that the parents I interviewed talked about my lack of parenting knowledge. On the basis of these findings, I conclude that work-family researchers should consider their positionality in terms of the 'implication of the researcher in the production of knowledge and a breaking down of the 'masculinist' separation of the private [world of the researcher] through the public [activity of research]' Burns and Walker (2005: 67). I discuss positionality in this paper to illuminate the subjective and critically reflective frameworks influencing my qualitative work-family research.

## **Paper Four**

Yarwood, G.A. (2012) 'Embodying Womanhood?: Doing Pregnancy, Doing Research'. Paper presented at: *The 3rd Global Conference on Femininities and Masculinities*. Prague, Czech Republic. 22 May.

### **Abstract**

In 2010, whilst undertaking qualitative research into parenting I became pregnant with my first child. In this paper I discuss my experiences of this with particular focus on my research relationship with the mothers and fathers I interviewed. I describe how, as a white woman researcher in my mid-thirties, I was positioned by the research participants within and outside mothering discourses based on cultural norms of femininity and heterosexuality. Drawing on my field notes I highlight how I negotiated the complex research relationships with the participants. I trace my identity shift from mother to non-mother by focusing on two aspects. Firstly, before my pregnancy I felt problematized by the participants based on expectations of mothering within women's reasonable life course (Sevón, 2005). Secondly, once pregnant, I found my embodied pregnancy was openly discussed by the research participants (often to my discomfort.) I argue that, unlike other circumstances, the physicality of pregnancy is considered normative practices of talk (Gatrell, 2005). I conclude this paper, by arguing that there is a need for closer examination of the taken for granted assumptions associated with the researcher / researched relationship. In particular, I suggest that researchers should consider the significance of their personal biography on the research process and research relationships (Letherby, 2003).

## **Paper Five**

Yarwood, G.A. (2013) 'A critical examination of enduring gendered constructs of caring and working within UK work-family reconciliation policy'. Presented at *Neoliberalism as Policy, Theory and Practice Conference*, Manchester Metropolitan University Manchester, UK. 6 June.

### **Abstract**

Focusing on the UK in early 21st century, I consider changes to women's participation within the labour market and men's unpaid caring activities. Within this context, I problematize the UK's work/family reconciliation policy by concentrating on neoliberal notions of the ideal worker and the good parent. I use feminist informed scholarship to critically consider the differential values placed on unpaid caring and paid work within these policies and the impact this has for women and men as workers and carers.

In this paper I draw on my PhD research. Particularly I highlight data taken from semi-structured interviews with 12 working parents with children under 5 years old. The data reveals the complex messiness of the participant's experiences of work-family reconciliation. I argue this messiness is glossed over in neo-liberal work-family reconciliation policy



## Paper Six

Yarwood, G.A. (2013) 'Working mothers, vomiting children and cancelled childcare: Disrupting gendered care/work arrangements'. Paper presented at: *BPS Psychology of Women Section Annual Conference*. Cumberland Lodge, Windsor. 11 July *Annual Research Institute of Health and Social Change Conference*.

### Abstract

For many British working mothers, the everyday realities of arranging childcare and paid work poses challenges. When a child or childcare provider is sick, nuanced working and caring arrangements are disrupted. Often these disruptions are at short notice and the responsibility defaults to the working mother to rearrange caring and working plans. Drawing on feminist informed scholarship of gender, work and family, I undertook an in-depth qualitative study into the experiences of working parents in twenty first century Britain. In this paper I focus on interview data from six working mothers describing their everyday realities of these work/care disruptions. My findings suggest that, whilst there is evidence of changes in caring and working participation amongst mothers and fathers (Fatherhood Institute, 2010; OECD, 2010) gendered care/work binaries persist, illuminated here using examples of sick children and cancelled childcare disrupting work/care arrangements.



**Fathering**  
1537-6680 (Print)  
1933-026X (Online)

**VOLUME 9**  
**ISSUE 2**  
**PAGES 150 — 168**

**MEN'S STUDIES PRESS, LLC**  
**PO Box 32**  
**HARRIMAN, TN 37748 USA**  
**WWW.MENSSTUDIES.COM**  
**423-369-2375 (PHONE)**  
**423-369-1125 (FAX)**



## **PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE**

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:  
<http://www.mensstudies.com/content/120394/>

### **TO CITE THIS ARTICLE**

Yarwood, G.A. (2011). The Pick and Mix of Fathering Identities. *Fathering*, 9(2), 150-168.

### **TO LINK TO THIS ARTICLE**

DOI: 10.3149/fth.0902.150

Url: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3149/fth.0902.150>

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Full terms and conditions of use:

[http://www.mensstudies.info/Terms\\_and\\_Conditions.pdf](http://www.mensstudies.info/Terms_and_Conditions.pdf)





## THE PICK AND MIX OF FATHERING IDENTITIES

*In this paper I ask, how can discursive research illustrate the flexible and negotiated identities of fatherhood? Using accounts from qualitative interviews with nine employed, first time fathers in the United Kingdom, this paper illuminates the complexities of their everyday lives as they try to make sense of dominant discourses of masculinity and fathering. I argue, fatherhood is dynamic rather than static by presenting discursive analysis of fathering talk. In particular, I critically analyse the hegemonic frames of fathering and masculinity in the UK and the everyday challenges these pose to fathers. I conclude by suggesting that fathers are not cultural dopes but discursive agents, struggling with the institutional norms of fatherhood. Finally I make recommendations for further scholarly research on the fluidity of fathering identities so that it may be embraced rather than side-lined in favour of static normative constructs.*

**Keywords:** fathering, identities, discursive research, work-family integration

---

Whilst mainstream parenting literature charts widespread changing working and family practices (Smock & Greenland, 2010), I argue that there is a need for evidence examining the everyday negotiations of work-family integration for fathers. In particular, the dearth of existing literature covering changing parenting practices along gender lines insufficiently develops accounts of the fluidity of fathering identities. Furthermore, it is limited in its examination of how hegemonic masculinities are embedded within dominant fathering and working discourse (Marsiglio, Amato, Day & Lamb, 2000).

In this paper, I use discursive research to illustrate the primacy of paid work to fathering identities, and how these present everyday challenges to fathers as they negotiate their identities. Here, I draw on accounts from qualitative interviews with nine employed, first time fathers in the United Kingdom to question the enduring construct of the male breadwinner. I present a critical consideration of the UK context of father-

---

<sup>a</sup>Department of Social Work and Social Care, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Gemma Anne Yarwood, Senior Lecturer in Department of Social Work and Social Care, Manchester Metropolitan University, 799 Wilmslow Road, Didsbury, Manchester, UK. Email: g.yarwood@mmu.ac.uk



*Fathering*, Vol. 9, No. 2, Spring 2011, 150-168.

© 2011 by the Men's Studies Press, LLC. All rights reserved. <http://www.mensstudies.com>  
fth.0902.150/\$15.00 • DOI: 10.3149/fth.0902.150 • ISSN/1537-6680 • eISSN/1933-026X

ing in which financial imperatives are driving firmly fixed normative work-family practices.

In Seward and Richter's (2008) discussion of fathering in the 21<sup>st</sup> century they call for the expansion of scholarly study on fathering issues to seek new horizons. They advocate, "An important question to ask is, to what extent, if at all, is a new approach to fatherhood possible under the domination of hegemonic masculinity?" (2008, p. 89). To address this question, I begin by suggesting that, in the UK, there have been some attempts within social, economic and political discourse to construct a gender neutral dual earner family (Gatrell, 2004). This is constructed on the premise of eroding the traditional gendered binary of male breadwinner and female primary caregiver. However, in the UK, the contemporary dual earner family construct itself is saturated with hegemonic representations of work-family practices and policies based on the traditional breadwinner and caregiver binary.

I propose that when fathering talk is examined discursively, we can begin to move away from static enduring constructions to alternative epistemologies acknowledging the complexity of work-family integration and the fluidity of fathering identities. To explore how stakeholders; particularly scholars, researchers and fathers themselves can facilitate this; I draw on qualitative research of fathers talking about their experiences of work-family integration. I now turn to explain this in more detail to provide the landscape of researching fathering identities using a specifically discursive methodological approach.

#### RESEARCHING FATHERING IDENTITIES USING A DISCURSIVE FRAMEWORK

In this paper, I propose undertaking research on fathering identities drawing on post-structuralist approaches, namely discursive research. A discursive research framework affords the opportunity to focus on the socially constructed nature of fathering. This is in line with contemporary UK research on *Men as Fathers* led by Henwood, Finn and Shirani (2008) who advocate a discursive approach.

Although there may be no one right or wrong way of approaching the study of men, masculinity or fatherhood, we believe that certain basic assumptions are now known to be unhelpful (e.g. masculinity and fatherhood as monolithic, unproblematic and unchanging entities). In this we are restating a (milestone) epistemic point for taking a discursive approach to identity. (Henwood, Finn & Shirani, 2008, p. 2)

Discursive research is the study of practices which systematically inform the objects of which they speak (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). Thus, fathers talking about fathering practices inform their constructions and representations of fathering identities. These identities are constructed and reproduced both in language and social reality. The data generated in the process of interviewing fathers about their everyday experiences of work-family life captures the messiness of everyday life as it is constructed and represented by those interviewed (Cameron, 2001). In fact, although there are a multitude

of approaches to discursive research, Gee (2005) frames this positively, arguing that no one approach is uniquely 'right' as different approaches fit different research. Whilst Speer (2007) argues that there is a strong division between particular versions of discursive research, Potter and Wetherell (1998, p. 81) believe that the distinction 'should not be painted too sharply'.

By drawing on the underlying assumptions of discourse studies (Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001), I demonstrate how discourses of work and family are negotiated and lived out in the 'everyday'. I also examine how these everyday negotiations connect to the UK social and political context and its constructions of working and parenting. My rationale for choosing this approach is that it enables me to examine the referential and dynamic nature of father's talk to illuminate the pick and mix fluidity of fathering identities. Discursive research provides the opportunity to examine what resources fathers use, or make relevant, in accounting for their actions. It assumes that people *do* things with their language and that the way fathers speak does much more than simply convey a picture of what they are describing. This approach will lead to a discussion of the flexibility of fatherhood revealed through identity negotiations in their talk. The findings presented in this paper demonstrate the futility of searching for a prototypical father and the need to transform normative fathering practices which embrace fluidity. Before I move on to critically analyse these findings in more detail, I will provide a foundation of the broader methodological and conceptual framework shaping the study.

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Hearn (2004, p. 49) has stated that "studying men is, in itself, neither new nor necessarily radical." Here, I draw on the much debated concept of hegemonic masculinity which has played a pivotal role in the development of gendered work on men. Carri-gan, Connell, and Lee (1985) characterise hegemonic masculinity; "not as a 'the male role' but a variety of masculinities to which others—among them young and effeminate as well as homosexual men—are subordinated" (p. 586).

Derived from Antonio Gramsci's (1971) Marxist thinking on class relations, hegemony refers to the social, political and cultural dynamics by which particular social groups establish and sustain power. Despite the concept of hegemony, being "as slippery and difficult as the idea of masculinity itself" (Donaldson, 1993, p. 2), scholars interested in the study of gender systems have mobilised Gramsci's work on hegemony. A key feature of hegemonic masculinity is the ways in which particular versions of masculinity are reproduced to establish and maintain dominance in relation to others. Indeed, this formulation recognizes that "masculinities [and femininities] come into existence at particular times and places and are always subject to change" (Connell, 1995, p. 185). This paper focuses on one such culturally exalted way of being a man in the UK today, namely, the breadwinner father and how this is discursively configured. Drawing on this intellectual location, the concept enables both the study of relations between men as fathers and also between men and women, as fathers and mothers (Whar-ton, 2004).

Hegemonic masculinity enables us to ask, “why, in specific formations, do certain ways of being male predominate, and particular sorts of men rule?” (Donaldson, 1993, p. 2) In addressing this question here, I consider, why do certain fathering identities predominate in the UK? Furthermore, why do particular versions of being a father in the UK focus on the primacy of paid work over unpaid caring work of children? Evidently this enduring prevalence of the breadwinner father has been charted by contemporary fathering research in the UK. Hauari and Hollingworth’s (2009) study of *Masculinity, Diversity and Change* found that the notion of the breadwinning father was endorsed by parents and children across their sample. This concurs with similar research findings on fathers, employment and family life undertaken a decade earlier by Warin, Solomon, Lewis and Langford (1999).

In this paper I explore the male breadwinner construct as a representation of hegemonic masculinity and fatherhood in early 21<sup>st</sup> century UK. The breadwinner father focuses on notions of ‘a good father’ providing for his family’s material needs by earning an income in paid employment outside the home (Collier, 2009). Earning an income which pays for their family’s food, shelter and material needs is embedded within the breadwinner father identity. The concept of hegemonic masculinity mobilises the discourse of measuring success by paid work and financial rewards within the norms of society. Hegemonic masculinity enables us to study how those who are unemployed or unpaid carers are seen as ‘other’ and subordinate (Willott & Griffin, 1997). With this in mind, I discursively analyse interview data from nine employed first time fathers in the UK with children under five years old. Thus, despite existing research identifying the male breadwinner father as a dominant version of masculinity and fathering, it is important to consider how this is lived out in the everyday experiences of fathers. I aim to take up Wetherell and Edley’s (1999) call for more detailed empirical research on the discursive resources and practices used by men to talk about negotiating their fathering identities.

Here, my discursive analysis considers the differential, persistent and idiosyncratic inflection of recognisable procedures evident in fathering talk. I pay particular attention to referential language used by the fathers interviewed. These fathers give culturally recognisable performances of fathering by drawing on available narratives. I situate these findings within the contemporary UK context which frames the research study and the everyday lives of fathers. The following section of the paper presents a brief outline of this context.

#### THE UNITED KINGDOM CONTEXT

For some scholars studying British fathering, the nuanced nature of negotiating identities can only be truly appreciated by understanding the context in which the process is situated (Smart & Shipman, 2004). One current research example which effectively acknowledges the importance of locating research in the UK context is the *Men as Fathers* project led by Henwood et al. (2008). They state:

Instead of taking the substance or content of masculinity (or indeed fatherhood) as static or given, men's identities are studied as they are forged in social interaction—a practice that is itself located, and that locates its (male) subjects, in place and time. (Henwood et al., 2008, p. 2)

Using visual and textual research methods, Henwood et al. (2008) explore the situated nature of fatherhood in time and place. They position fathers as discursive agents within the broader social, economic and political UK landscape of parenting. This approach attends to the contextual features influencing working and parenting lives. It enables researchers to gain a clear understanding of how men's identities as fathers and workers are located in place and time. Thus for the purpose of this paper it is important to review the significant social, economic and political context shaping fathering in Britain today.

Significantly, the UK has experienced a recent political shift from The Labour Party (who were in political office from 1997-2010) to the recently established Conservative - Liberal Democrat Coalition (in political office from May 2010). David Cameron, the present UK Prime Minister, recently spoke of the continued political commitment to what he refers to as “family friendly reform agenda in the UK” (Cameron, 2010). This is based on an economic rationalism discourse (Kahu & Morgan, 2007) and at its heart lies a normative family constructed on the dual earner couple. This is embedded within UK work-family policy and practice, emphasising the financial imperative that parents engage in paid employment. Successive governments have established the political commitment to this agenda with an all political party consensus on parental leave<sup>1</sup> and flexible working for parents.<sup>2</sup> (The Cabinet Office, 2010) In accordance, all UK political leaders advocate, what is often labelled, ‘good parenting’. But what is good parenting in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain?

British political discourse and policy defines a ‘good parent’ as economically active within the labour market (Collier, 2009). ‘Good parenting’ is dependent on challenging individuals to be responsible parents by working hard and reaping financial rewards. Indeed, some commentators argue that within this ‘good parent’ discourse, the traditional male breadwinner and stay at home mother dualism no longer has currency in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain. This dualism is considered contentious in the light of significant changing patterns of gender participation in both paid employment outside the home and informal caring within the home (Gambles, Lewis & Rapoport, 2006). In fact, since the introduction of parental leave rights in 1999 to comply with the European Union Directive, UK work-care arrangements have been transformed (den Dulk, 2001). There has been extended opportunities for less rigid traditionally gendered caregiver and

---

<sup>1</sup> A maximum 13 weeks parental leave is available if a child is aged under five, (or under 18 if a child is disabled). All employed women are entitled to 52 weeks maternity leave. All men are entitled to 2 weeks paternity leave. Liaison with employers is required due to differentials in financial and other arrangements.

<sup>2</sup> A parent with a child under 17 (or a disabled child under 18 who gets Disability Living Allowance) has the right to request flexible working. Employers have a duty to consider the request if the employee has worked there for 26 weeks. The right to request is available to both men and women, and covers the hours an employee works, the times s/he is required to work and the place of work (i.e. home or a workplace).

breadwinner constructs. Thus, work and family are not static, unchanging institutions but reflect and adapt to developments in wider society. As gender relations change so do work and family arrangements and vice versa. Therefore by locating research in this context we are able to understand the intertwined complexity of work-family integration and the challenges it poses to the everyday lives of working fathers.

In turning to other aspects of the changing nature of UK work-family life, many scholars have focused on women's participation in the labour force. To do this they have utilised the normative definition of work as paid employment and directed research specifically on trends of women's workforce participation. "Women make up nearly half of the workforce in the UK and 80% will become mothers during their working life. With the average age of motherhood in the UK being 30, most women at work over this age will also be working parents." (Working Families, 2010, p. 3) Consequently, much of this work is part-time paid work outside the home. Women continue to provide the majority of informal care in the home (Hansen, Joshi & Dex, 2010). Evidently, as women continue to provide the majority of informal care, the research spotlight shines on women's work-family integration rather than men's (Craig & Sawrikar, 2009). This further demonstrates the need for research on fathers to redress this imbalance in scholarly interest.

Equally significant to Britain's shifting work-family integration landscape is the impact of economic recession in the UK. The country is experiencing rising unemployment rates, marked reductions in the number of men employed in all sectors of UK industry. The latest unemployment figures are higher than predicted, with the coalition government's spending cuts and tax hikes expected to take effect in 2011 (Office for National Statistics, 2010). In fact, despite a recent heightened politicisation of fatherhood (Collier, 2009) some scholars argue that there is a much needed shift in understanding fathering and work-family integration. More broadly, there is a growing number of scholars who argue for a new approach to work-family research which extends research horizons (Smock & Greenland, 2010; Seward & Richter, 2008) taking these contextual factors into consideration.

In this outline I have highlighted the need for research which locates fathering within the changing contemporary UK context. I have attempted to suggest that, "Generalising theories, or even aggregate statistics, cannot fully capture the variability, processes and meaning in people's response to change" (Williams, 2004, p. 23). In this sense, whilst focusing on workforce patterns is useful, it does not provide the rich insights into the complex negotiations taking place within the everyday lives of fathers as they integrate work and family life. It is for this reason that I present discursive research which attends to the intricate nuances of fathering talk so that a deeper understanding can emerge. With this in mind, I will now turn to the research design in an attempt to specify the procedures of data collection and analysis I adopted.

#### RESEARCH PROCESS AND INTERVIEWS

The data examined in this paper focuses on first time fathers talking about their experiences of work-family integration. This data has been extracted from semi-struc-



tured interviews with nine first time fathers as part of a qualitative research project on experiences of work-family integration. Two out of the nine fathers did not live with their children but had shared care contact arrangements. All nine of the fathers were in paid employment at the time of data collection (2006-2010). Their occupations were as follows- Police officer, Sales consultant, Architect, Administrator, Security guard, Librarian, IT technician, Nurse and Car Mechanic. Thus the occupations covered both manual and non manual work and varied in type and contractual arrangements including part-time, full-time, flexi-time, shift work, compressed hours and temporary contracts. I used the normative definition of work as paid employment within the labour market, drawing on much of the existing work-family literature and research covering labour force participation (Office for National Statistics, 2010).

The data was based on nine first time fathers living and working in the UK. They varied in cohabiting arrangements, marital status and ethnicity. All identified themselves as heterosexual and were aged between 29 and 40 years old. When sampling participants I chose to include first time fathers in paid work with children aged five years and under. I chose this because most contemporary changes to UK work-family policy and practice (between the research period 2006-2010) centred on families with children under five years old, namely extensions to parental leave entitlements (maternity / paternity leave, parental and carers) and flexible working rights. Furthermore I felt that the years from birth to five required the most significant levels of intensive caring (Craig & Sawrikar, 2009) thus provided the most data rich site for this research.

To ground this sample in the broader UK context, my research attempted to draw on the good practice of the Millennium Cohort Study (Hansen et al., 2010), a large scale longitudinal study of 19,000 children born in the UK in 2000/2001. In line with this large scale study, my in-depth study was open to participants from all occupational groups. During the recruitment period, my participants were given the opportunity to learn about the study through initial advertising using posters, websites and electronic communication tools such as emails and notice boards. These requested volunteers to make contact with me in the first instance to discuss potential participation, ethical considerations and research procedures. Unlike the Millennium Cohort Study (Hansen et al., 2010), I used a snowballing sampling technique and do not claim that those recruited in my study are representative. The snowballing sampling technique enabled me to ask those fathers who volunteered in the first instance to act as gatekeepers, providing contact points to other potential participants. This enabled my sample group to expand through fathers recommending others who fitted my sample criteria of being a working first time father with a child under five years old. I was given access to informal networks developed through baby massage clubs, parent and toddler groups, and day nursery rhythm and rhyme sessions. These were all sites where I recruited volunteers using the snowballing sampling techniques.

The snowballing approach focused on recruiting a sample of volunteers who had become first time fathers in the past five years (2006-2010). The rationale for this choice was that during this period there had been significant changes to the UK policy and practice context. It was felt that by choosing volunteers who had become first time fa-

thers in the past five years, the research could draw on their experiences of work-family integration within the recent policy and practice context. In particular I felt that I could explore the impact and influence of most recent work-family policy agenda as it played out in the lived experiences of the participants. This contemporary policy landscape did not differentiate between father and child's residency arrangements therefore co-residency was not a requirement of the sample (although only two of the total nine volunteers recruited did not live permanently with their child.). In fact since the Child Support Act 1991 there has been a conscious effort by policy makers to involve fathers particularly if they are non-resident with their children due to the economic benefits.

Each father was interviewed separately using semi-structured interviews. I gained signed ethical consent from each participant and the interviews took place in a negotiated location that both the participant and I felt comfortable with (Daly, 2007). Interviews were initiated with general demographic questions, followed by a variety of loosely structured questions based on key themes related to the experiences of work-family integration. For example, what does it mean to you to be a dad? Could you tell me about any differences between your worker identity and father identity? And, how do you negotiate your work and family weekly schedule? Although the interviews had a skeleton of common questions, I adopted an open and flexible approach, permitting the participants to raise and focus on the issues that were of central importance to them. This open and flexible approach also allowed reflexivity in the research process because at the beginning of data collection I was not a parent but during the process my status changed, allowing different insight and access into the world of parenting. I made my status known to the participants, allowing my own experiences to be shared in the process (Burr, 2003). Throughout, I documented and explored how my changing personal location informed the research process.

Each interview was allocated an hour slot and was recorded using a Dictaphone which I later transcribed employing a simplified version of Jeffersonian notation- (O'Byrne, Rapley & Hansen, 2006). I examined the data, paying particular attention to both the discursive practices and resources of the participants. This involved reading the transcripts asking, how do working fathers talk about work-family integration and how is this talk framed by wider discursive resources of working and parenting? I used the concept of referential language to highlight how the participants refer to other men and fathers when talking about their identities. I adopted a procedure of reading and re-reading transcripts to generate data of regularities in discursive strategies used to talk about themselves by referencing other fathers. These findings from transcriptions were examined within the broader discursive practices and resources of working and parenting by drawing on existing UK based fathering literature to develop a theoretical account (Day, Gough & McFadden, 2003).

#### THE FINDINGS

In these findings I use interview extracts to demonstrate discursive strategies adopted by the participants to negotiate their identities. Secondly, I highlight the referential na-

ture of talk as the fathers make sense of their complex identities. This demonstrates the socially constructed nature of fathering identities (Burr, 2003). As language is referential and constitutive it provides opportunities to widen the references they use to aid the development of understanding the fluidity of fathering identities. This signifies a departure from the traditionally static search for the prototypical father drawn from dominant hegemonic masculinities which presently persist (Smart & Shipman, 2004). In a sense, this attends to the call by Seward and Richter (2008) to expand horizons of fathering scholarly study in which they recommend considering the extent to which a new approach to fatherhood is possible under the domination of hegemonic masculinity. What follows is my attempt to address this question using discursive data. For the purpose of this paper, I begin by giving a detailed discussion of one father, Rick, a full time employed Sales Consultant. I analyse extracts taken from Rick's interview data. I then move on to briefly discuss extracts from interviews with other fathers in the study to highlight the referential language they use when talking about their fathering identities.

### *The Dynamic Referential Nature of Fathering Talk*

In this study, the data demonstrates how the participants talk about their fathering identities referentially. Frequently they refer to their own experiences of being a child and their relationship with their own parents, father and mother (either biological or legal guardian) (Henwood et al., 2008). Below is evidence drawn from Rick, a full-time employed Sales Consultant. He mobilises particular normative discourses of working and caring. In doing so he depicts the complexity of negotiating fathering identities and the paradoxical relationship between paid work and informal caring. Extract 1 below helps explain these points more fully.

#### EXTRACT 1.

Rick: I mean from my point of view, my parents worked. I was brought up by 2 hard working parents. You know, when I was at school we either had to go to other people's houses or I mean my mum did everything up until I was about 6 years old and then she was out working (Rick, a full-time employed sales consultant).

Here Rick chooses to begin his statement by focusing on paid work when referring to his parents. He does not refer to them as patient, fun or loving for instance. "Worked" and "working" are words used by Rick to emphasise its importance to his parent's identities, as well as his own. He depicts his family constituted by "two hard working parents." He discursively constructs a normative family, what he considers 'conventional', based on the family in which he was a child. He uses "you know" to appeal to my understanding as he suggests that paid work resulted in both his parents being absent from the home. To substantiate this, he gives an example of being cared for by people other than his parents who were at work, "...when I was at school we either had to go to other people's houses." Thus extract 1 contains elements of Rick's justification, de-

fending his own position as a full time working father meaning absence from the home. The hegemonic frameworks of masculinity and fathering here are at odds with work-family integration due to the paradoxical relationship between paid work and unpaid caring. Through my discursive analysis I have interpreted that Rick is suggesting there is a choice to be made between working and caring as he cannot be at home caring for his child whilst out of the home earning a wage. The hegemonic frameworks of fathering and masculinity point to the primacy of paid work over unpaid caring.

When we examine extract 1 closer still, what is also interesting is the contradiction in his talk, namely that he depicts both his parents as hard working yet he describes his mother as being present and the main caregiver until Rick was aged six. "I mean my mum did everything up until I was about 6 years old and then she was out working." Therefore although paid work is given primacy in this account, it is embedded more deeply in his father's identity than in his mother's. This primacy of paid work is mobilised through normative constructs of the breadwinner father and is an indication of the influence of hegemonic masculinity within discourses of work and family (Wharton, 2004). Rick draws on notions of being a good role model, a hard working father providing for his family's material needs through paid employment. The data demonstrates Rick presenting a moral self in which he refers to his own father in attempt to position himself as a good father (Collier, 2009). This, however, is not straightforward for Rick who uses talk to convey how he struggles with the complexity of this fathering identity.

In extract 2 below, Rick describes himself as a provider father giving examples of material possessions such as "a nicer home and a garden" paid for by working hard. Once again Rick's talk is referential of his own father as he draws on fiscal discourses when discussing himself and his own parents. He positions himself within an economic rationalism discourse (Kahu & Morgan, 2007) to prioritise his worker identity.

EXTRACT 2.

Rick: I think from that point of view, I just think, I just want more things. I'd rather have a nicer home and a garden. I know maybe that sounds quite materialistic? Maybe I'd like to have had my dad around more? Maybe I would? But I'd rather have an environment which is going to set him (my son) up for life and is going to inspire (Rick, a full-time employed sales consultant).

Here in extract 2, Rick describes the dilemmatic nature of fathering identities by suggesting that there is a 'trade off' between unpaid caring and paid work. He uses repetition "I just think, I just..." when explaining his paid work and child care choices. As part of this he refers to the choices his own father made to prioritise paid work which meant he was often out of the home. Also, by posing questions, "I know maybe that sounds quite materialistic? Maybe I'd like to have had my dad around more? Maybe I would?" Rick shifts positions between certainty and more ambivalent talk with the repetitive use of "Maybe." This contradictory nature of Rick's talk suggests he is trying to make sense of his identity as a father, using his own father as a point of reference (Henwood, et al., 2008). This poses its own challenges for Rick as he rationalises

the demands of his full time worker identity with the conflicting demands of carer. His talk uses stake inoculation to construct a persuasive account to pre-empt and counter any accusation or claim that he is “materialistic” as he details “I’d rather have a nicer home and a garden. I know maybe that sounds quite materialistic?” To substantiate this he states “But I’d rather have an environment which is going to set him (my son) up for life and is going to aspire to.” By drawing on this economic rationalism discourse (Kahu & Morgan, 2007), he positions himself as a good father (Collier, 2009) within the norms of his society.

Extract 3 reveals how I posed a probing question in an attempt to expand my analysis further to gain a clearer insight of Rick’s understanding of a good father.

EXTRACT 3.

GY: So, do you mean your role model of a good father has a strong work ethic?

Rick: I know that it sounds really bad.

GY: No I’m not.....

Rick: ... In another way I’d rather have that mentality. I don’t know. I just want him to be as successful as he can. I think if you put that idea into his head at an early age then hopefully that is what they will aspire to be.

In response to my probing question “So, do you mean your role model of a good father has a strong work ethic?” Rick replies defensively “I know that it sounds really bad.” This suggests that he is aware of the dilemmatic nature of the traditionally masculinised breadwinner and its engendered work ethic (Bunting, 2005; James, 2007). Clearly there is evidence too of my own discomfort with this hegemonic masculinised father identity and in my efforts, as a researcher, not to appear judgemental I try to reassure him by saying “No I’m not.” However, as extract 3 reveals, he interrupts me by attempting to further justify and rationalise his position as a working father.

Extract 3 highlights how fathering identities have been transformed to accommodate a position more complex than that of the traditional breadwinner father who goes out to work leaving the caring duties to others. Discursively, Rick presents a moral self (May, 2008) to suggest that his ‘public’ breadwinner status alone is inadequate to his father identity due to the broader contemporary demands on ‘the father’ to provide for his son’s more ‘private’ caring needs. Indeed, this dilemmatic private / public division rooted in traditional work-family discourses (Wharton, 2004) was intrinsic to much of the interview data analysed in this research study. For instance, all the fathers interviewed in the study talked of the dilemmas of combining a financial provider identity with the unpaid caring work essential to their children’s wide ranging care needs. This data adds weight to the argument that fathering identities are complex, requiring research which navigates a clearer understanding of the flexible rather than static nature of fatherhood (Marsiglio et al., 2000). Of particular note is the potential to expose and utilise the multiple fathering identities to develop a contemporary understanding of how these are negotiated in the everyday (Seward & Richter, 2008).

In light of the detailed analysis of Rick above, I now turn to other fathers from the study to highlight further examples of referential talk. By doing this I highlight how,

similarly to Rick, other fathers discursively traverse a range of fathering identities. For instance, when talking about their own biography, all the fathers in the study mobilised or distanced themselves from their own father's identity. Henwood et al., (2008) comment that by fathers using talk they are:

Positioning themselves in relation to 'progressive' ideas of the involved 'new' father and more traditional positions of paternal strength, provision, protection and support involved an exploration of identity and relational dynamics in relation to time and change, and to historical and sociocultural contexts, moving us some way towards a fuller understanding of the old/new dynamic as complexly temporal. (Henwood et al., 2008, p. 4)

Extract 4 below illustrates this. Jake, a part-time employed security guard, considers his identity as a father by referring to his own childhood and his father.

EXTRACT 4.

Jake: I do look back as a dad and think about what mine did with me (Jake, a part-time employed security guard.)

Unlike Rick's father, Jake's father is deceased. Jake found it difficult to talk about his own deceased father without becoming emotional. The silences provided discursive cues (Cameron, 2001) indicating the challenges Jake faced talking about his own identity as a father with that of the memory of his deceased father. When interviewed, he rarely talked about his father explicitly but would use sophisticated discursive strategies to make links about his own identity and his father's identity as demonstrated in extract 5 below.

EXTRACT 5.

Jake: Yeah we named our son that because of my dad. He didn't do much with me when I was a kid because he wasn't around much but it's in memory to him.

GY: Do you do things differently with your son to when you were a kid with your dad?

Jake: I suppose yeah because it's a bit early stages because I can't remember that far back yet.

Extract 5 shows that when I asked Jake about his son's name he volunteered, "Yeah we named our son that because of my dad. He didn't do much with me when I was a kid because he wasn't around much but it's in memory to him." Jake used "didn't do much" "wasn't around much" repeating "much" to contrast with more detailed lists of what he did with his own son. Extract 5 shows that when I attempted to probe this, Jake gave a plausible argument that it was difficult to compare his own childhood with that of his son's because he couldn't "remember that far back"

What is interesting about Jake's talk is that he appeared to substitute referring to his own father with reference to other fathers he identifies as his contemporaries. This was

also apparent in examining the data from Neil, another father from the study. Neil, a full-time employed nurse, identified himself as “adopted” and followed a similar pattern of talk to Jake with reference to “other dads.” For instance extract 6 is taken from Neil’s description about his experiences of being a dad.

EXTRACT 6.

Neil: I was adopted so didn’t know my parents but I can see what I’m like with my son by looking at other working dads who go to dads’ day at the playgroup (Neil, a full-time employed nurse).

Neil uses references to “other working dads” to position himself discursively amongst his contemporaries. Thus, both Neil and Jake present themselves as morally good fathers based on their contemporaries. They talk about ‘falling in line with other dads’. Again this leads me to question the influence of societal norms in which a series of prescribed actions provide normative ways of doing and being fathers, namely those built on serving the hegemonic practices and policies of work family integration based on economic rationalism discourses (Kahu & Morgan, 2007). Thus we see how discourses of fathering involve fathers prescribing to and being prescribed by traditional hegemonic masculinity shaping fathering identities. This poses challenges to the everyday experiences of negotiating fathering identities.

For Jake, Neil, Rick, Tim and the other participants, their talk revealed shared meanings of fatherhood. For instance, extract 7 demonstrates that when asked about being a dad, Tim, a full-time employed police officer, draws on the concept of shared meaning.

EXTRACT 7.

Tim: Everyone knows what a dad does, he works and does what he can for his kids. (Tim, a full-time employed police officer).

Tim’s talk contains a mutual exchange of shared meanings of fathering. Tim’s vague comment above, “does what he can for his kids” is ambiguous, indicating that the cultural norms of fatherhood are based on shared meaning “Everyone knows what a dad does.” Interestingly, apart from paid work, he does not state any other specific tasks he associates with fathering practices. Tim constructs fatherhood as a process of “does what he can” yet his talks indicates that there is a challenge in actually pinpointing the specifics of this other than through paid work. As I have stated earlier in this paper, the UK context of fathering places significant emphasis of a good parent being economically active. Therefore Tim’s comment that a father “does what he can” can be discursively interpreted as a father providing financially for his child within the norms and practices of good parenting in the UK. Similarly to Tim, the other participants used discursive strategies; sometimes accepting, rejecting or simply recognising the constitutive nature of the shared meanings of being and doing fathering.

The following extract 8 is Jake describing taking his son to playgroup. It shows that with shared meanings, fathers can experience everyday challenges in harnessing the



power to expand discourses of fathering. Essentially, although individuals attempt to challenge hegemonic static fathering identities, Jake's example of self positioning demonstrates "...the conundrum of men who appear to be both hegemonic and non-hegemonic, complicit and resistant at the same time" (Wetherell & Edley, 1999, p. 33).

EXTRACT 8.

GY: Does taking your son to playgroup make you feel good about being a dad?

Jake: Yeah

GY: Go on then, why?

Jake: Because I'm probably the only dad that is there at playgroup. Some weeks anyway. But I seem to have started a trend off in there because they are all women. Older women run it and the women who go, the mums, erm, from like late 20s upwards, erm I think they all got a bit surprised when I turned up anyway. First time anyway. "He's a dad, what's he's doing?" Anyway they must have been having words with their own partners and occasionally you get the odd dad coming.

As the extract demonstrates, Jake talked about his own fathering identity in relation to others. Jake does not, however, liken himself to other fathers in the way Neil and Tim do, as I have illustrated above. Instead, Jake differentiates himself from other fathers. For instance, Jake is a part-time security guard earning less than his partner, a full-time social worker. He suggests that he works part-time rather than full-time so that he can care for his son. He says this is not "the norm" and goes on to provide a detailed scenario of how he does this, positioning himself as being in the minority in terms of challenging hegemonic fathering norms. He gives an example of "I'm probably the only dad that is there at playgroup." When I probe, "Go on then, why?" Jake positions himself as a morally good father compared to his contemporaries.

Extract 8 above shows how Jake uses discursive detail to narrate his experience of challenging hegemonic fathering norms by expressing feeling separate and different to the majority in a group of adults at his son's playgroup. In this extract he talks about his moral self (May, 2008) as a good father by drawing referentially on how others; mothers, fathers and playgroup organisers, respond to him being at the playgroup. As the extract progresses, his talk shifts from his initial tentative language to more confident talk about how he feels good "Because I'm probably the only dad that is there." He positions himself initially as an outsider, challenging norms around who is expected to attend the playgroup. His talk reflects a sense of self pride as a father and as someone who is slowly more accepted into the group by suggesting "I think they all got a bit surprised when I turned up anyway. First time anyway. He's a dad, what's he's doing?" Here he uses tentative phrasing in his account such as "erm," "anyway" and "First time anyway." To substantiate his claim he also includes what he perceives are the questions the other adults are asking themselves and others "He's a dad, what's he's doing?" This adds to his construction of his own identity as powerful by inferring he could 'read their minds', anticipate their questions, thus setting himself apart from the



other fathers he refers to. Furthermore, he adds disclaimers “I’m probably” and “Some weeks anyway” to suggest that whilst other fathers now attend playgroup, Jake positions himself as the leader of this change “But I seem to have started a trend off in there.” Thus Jake suggests he has mobilised a new acceptance of fathers who attend the playgroup.

From extract 8 above then, it would appear that Jake’s talk and social action is challenging and dismantling the dominant hegemonic masculine constructs which shape fathering norms. Jake does not position himself as the archetypal ‘breadwinner’ and he talks about himself as a part-time worker rather than full-time worker. This appears, initially, as an informed choice with Jake positioning himself as an active agent choosing to provide childcare to his son at the expense of paid work (Williams, 2004). However, on a more detailed examination of his talk, it becomes clear that this poses challenges for Jake and he is not necessarily the leader of change he earlier constructs himself to be when discussing his attendance at playgroup. Instead we begin to see how he is struggling with the structural restrictions imposed by hegemonic frames of masculinity and fathering which prioritise paid work over informal care.

Jake talks of the financial need to work to support his family and also the dilemma this poses in that he relies on extended family to provide childcare whilst he and his partner attend paid work because formal childcare is too expensive. Thus, in the following extract 9, Jake talks further about his experiences of work-family integration as an intricate arrangement of formal and informal childcare and paid employment. In testament to this, extract 9 highlights Jake saying, “My in-laws care for him, call it from 11am so 6 to 7 hours a day, 3 days a week, whilst we are both working.” This supports the depiction of the complex reality of work-family integration which is often glossed over by politicians and policy makers.

EXTRACT 9.

GY: So you work part-time and your partner works full-time? How often does your family care for your son?

Jake: My in-laws care for him, call it from 11am, so 6 to 7 hours a day, 3 days a week, whilst we are both working. Oh aye. It saves on the cost of nursery places these days. They are about £30 a day.

Clearly this account bears evidence that informal care is deemed more financially astute than paying for the cost of formal childcare. Many of the study’s participants mirror Jake’s discursive strategy of detailing the actual cost of formal child care. Jake states “They (nursery places) are about £30 a day.” Thus despite Jake initially positioning himself outside the normative practices of working and parenting, clearly this is not the case. Instead we hear how he too is prescribed by and prescribing to these norms rooted in the primacy of paid work and the priority of paid work over caring for his own children.

By discursively analysing Jake’s talk it appears to concur with Finn and Henwood’s (2009) findings which suggest that fathering talk reveals how fathers position themselves as gender nonconformists. Ironically the ‘gender rebel’ they construct is em-

bedded within hegemonic masculine values of independence, autonomy and assertive courage. Thus even if they construct themselves as a nonconformist, this process is packaged within language of hegemonic masculine values and practices. With this in mind it seems appropriate to return to the Wetherell and Edley's (1999) discursive analysis of men's negotiation of hegemonic masculinity;

The man, for instance, who describes himself as original, as beyond stereotype, as having a personal worked out philosophy of masculinity or indeed just ordinary and average has not escaped the familiar tropes of gender. He is precisely enmeshed by convention; subjectified, ordered and disciplined at the very moment he rehearses the language of personal taste, unconventionality and autonomy or ordinariness and normality. (Wetherell & Edley, 1999, p. 33)

Thus, in analysing the differential, persistent and idiosyncratic inflection of recognisable procedures evident in the data extracts, I have demonstrated the challenges of negotiating fathering identities. Rick, Jake and the other fathers interviewed use talk to make sense of their everyday experiences. These are enmeshed within societal norms and practices of working and caring. Therefore despite fathers like Jake talking of non-conforming by being the only dad at playgroup, in effect, he is prescribed by and prescribing to particular forms of masculinity in practice through talk and social action. By setting himself apart from other fathers he is reinforcing the ordinariness of dominant masculine values which can be found in in Rick and other fathers accounts..

#### Conclusions

In this paper I have provided empirical evidence that supports earlier research on the negotiation of fathering identities. Despite the associated methodological limitations of providing a small sample of fathering talk, it is clear that discursive analysis provides evidence of the complex and fluid nature of fathering identities. By reviewing the UK context of these findings, I have demonstrated that the breadwinner father remains an enduring dominant construct. My evidence confirms that being economically active within the labour market remains linked to the conception of good fathering in the UK. However, I have also suggested that, in contemporary Britain, being a father is complex. Fathers are expected to be more than a financial provider. Fathers must negotiate complex identities which challenge how they integrate work and family life everyday.

It is apparent that fathering identities pose far more complex everyday challenges than is often acknowledged (Marsiglio et al., 2000). Furthermore, although Connell's (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity provides a starting point for studying fathering identities, it is important to examine how this plays out in their everyday lives. Discursive research provides the tools to undertake a fine grained analysis of culturally exalted forms of masculinity and fatherhood. In this instance, it has illustrated how hegemonic frameworks of masculinity and fathering are at odds with work-family integration policy agenda due to the paradoxical relationship between paid work and unpaid caring.

After examining discursive data, it is evident that fathers draw on a smorgasbord of identities. These identities can be restricted by hegemonic constructs of masculinity

and fatherhood such as the breadwinner father. Within this conceptual framework, those who are in part-time rather than full-time employment, the unemployed and informal carers are deemed subordinate. Thus despite the contemporary broadening of traditional constructs to accommodate notions of fathers as nurturers and carers, this smorgasbord of identifications is restricted by dominant homogenous normative constructs (Smart and Shipman, 2004).

In this paper I have considered Seward and Richter's (2008) call to expand horizons of research on fathering. In asking, "To what extent has a "new" approach to fathering emerged? Is the concept of the caring father just an often stated norm, a theoretical concept, or is it actively practiced?" Seward and Richter (2008, p.88) have raised important questions about the fluidity and negotiated nature of fathering. With this in mind, I have attempted to provide evidence of the ways in which fathering talk is an expression of performing and negotiating fathering identities. I have highlighted how fathering identities are mobilised through shared meanings of masculinity and fatherhood.

By adopting a discursive approach to fathering research, the data presented demonstrates fathers using discursive strategies to present a moral self in which they refer to other fathers, both within and across generations (Henwood et al., 2008). Fathers present a moral self of the 'good' father in line with social and political discourses on good parenting in early 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain. Discursive analysis of fathering talk reveals how they construct themselves as a 'good father', through a series of sophisticated discursive strategies when talking about challenges of everyday life. It is here that the paradoxes of paid work and caring become evident.

In this paper I have considered the challenges fathers face in negotiating the traditional norms of fathering and working. I recommend that researchers should embrace the development of a body of knowledge which critically considers these in favour of more co-operative work-family discourses acknowledging the rich diversity of father's lives. I suggest that continued scholarly work is needed to develop an understanding of the negotiated nature of fathering identities. This could be undertaken using discursive research to analyse fathering talk. By paying close attention to discursive strategies we can examine how fathers use referential language to navigate discourses of working and fathering in their daily lives. Researchers using this approach could explore the fluidity of fathering identities as fathers mobilise and distance themselves from the breadwinner father and other hegemonic frames of fathering and masculinity. The emergence of a new approach to fathering research (Seward & Richter, 2008) needs to acknowledge the referential nature of fathering talk based on shared meanings about contemporary fathering. By focusing on these shared meanings, discursive research demonstrates the value of understanding the rich diversity of everyday experiences of fathering. To capture this richness I advocate further research which draws on the involvement of a range of stakeholders including scholars, policy makers, practitioners and fathers themselves. In doing so, alternative epistemologies acknowledging the fluidity of fathering identities can be facilitated.

REFERENCES

- Bunting, M. (2005). *Willing slaves*. London: Harper Perennial.
- Burr, V. (2003). *Social constructionism*. East Sussex: Routledge.
- The Cabinet Office. (2010). *The coalition: Our programme for government*. London: HMSO.
- Cameron, D. (2001). *Working with spoken discourse*. London: Sage.
- Cameron, D. (2010) *Speech on families and relationships*. Retrieved December 10, 2010, from <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/speeches-and-transcripts/2010/12/speech-on-families-and-relationships-58035>
- Carrigan, T., Connell, R.W., & Lee, J. (1985). Toward a new sociology of masculinity. *Theory and Society*, 14, 551-604.
- Collier, R. (2009). Fatherhood, law and fathers' rights: Rethinking the relationship between gender and welfare. In J. Herring, M. Choudry, & J. Wallbank (Eds.), *Rights, gender and family law* (pp. 119-143). London: Routledge.
- Connell, R.W. (1995). *Masculinities*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Craig, L., & Sawrikar, P. (2009). Work and family: How does the (gender) balance change as children grow? *Gender, Work and Organization*, 16, 684-709.
- Daly, K. (2007). *Qualitative methods for family studies and human development*. London: Sage.
- Day, K., Gough, B., & McFadden, M. (2003). Women who drink and fight: A discourse analysis of working-class women's talk. *Feminism and Psychology*, 13, 141-158.
- den Dulk, L. (2001). *Work-Family Arrangements in Organizations: A Cross-national Study in the Netherlands, Italy, the United Kingdom and Sweden*. Amsterdam: Rozenberg.
- Donaldson, M. (1993). What is hegemonic masculinity? *Theory and Society*, 22(5), 643-657.
- Finn, M. & Henwood, K. (2009). Exploring masculinities within men's identificatory imaginings of first time fatherhood. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 48(3), 547-562.
- Foucault, M. (1972). *Archaeology of knowledge*. New York: Pantheon.
- Gambles, R., Lewis, S., & Rapoport, R. (2006). *The myth of work-life balance*. West Sussex: Wiley.
- Gatrell, C. (2004). *Hard labour. The sociology of parenthood*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gramsci, A. (1971) *Selections from the prison notebooks*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Gee, J.P. (2005). *An introduction to discourse*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London: Routledge.
- Hansen, K., Joshi, H., & Dex, S. (Eds.). (2010). *Children of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: The first five years*. The Millennium Cohort Study series. London: Polity Press.
- Hauari, H., & Hollingworth, K. (2009). *Understanding fathering. Masculinity, diversity and change*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Hearn, J. (2004) From hegemonic masculinity to the hegemony of men. *Feminist Theory*, 5(1), 49-72.
- Henwood, K. L., Finn, M., & Shirani, F. (2008). Use of visual methods to explore parental identities in historical time and social change: Reflections from the men-as-fathers project. *Qualitative Researcher*, 9, 112-115.
- James, O. (2007). *Affluenza*. London: Vermillion.
- Kahu, E.R., & Morgan, M. (2007). A critical discourse analysis of New Zealand government policy: Women as mothers and workers. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 30, 134-146.
- Marsiglio, W., Amato, P., Day, R.D., & Lamb, M.E., (2000). Scholarship on fatherhood in the 1990s and beyond. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 62, 1173-1191.
- May, V. (2008). On being a 'good' mother: The moral presentation of self. *Sociology*, 42, 470-486.

- O'Byrne, R., Rapley, M., & Hansen, S. (2006). You couldn't say "no", could you?': Young men's understandings of sexual refusal. *Feminism & Psychology*, 16, 133-154.
- Office for National Statistics. (2010). *Focus on UK Labour Market Statistics*. Retrieved December 15, 2010, from <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=12>
- Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1998). Discourse analysis and the identification of interpretive repertoires. In C. Antaki (Ed.), *Analysing everyday explanations: A casebook of methods* (pp. 163-183). London: Sage.
- Seward, R.R., & Richter, R. (2008). International research on fathering: an expanding horizon. *Fathering*, 6(2) 87-91.
- Smart, C., & Shipman, B. (2004). Visions in monochrome: families, marriage and the individualization thesis. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 55(4), 491-509.
- Smock, P.J., & Greenland, F.R. (2010). Diversity in pathways to parenthood: Patterns, implications and emerging research directions. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72, 576-593.
- Speer, S.A. (2007). On recruiting conversation analysis for critical realist purposes. *Theory & Psychology*, 17, 125-135.
- Warin, J., Solomon, Y., Lewis, C., & Langford, W. (1999). *Fathers, work and family life*. London: Family Policy Studies Centre and Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Wetherell, M., & Edley, N. (1999). Negotiating hegemonic masculinity: Imaginary positions and psycho-discursive practices, *Feminism and Psychology*, 9(3), 335-356.
- Wetherell, M., Taylor, S., & Yates, S. (2001). *Discourse as data*. London: Sage in association with The Open University.
- Wharton, A. (2004). *The sociology of gender*. London: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Williams, F. (2004). *Rethinking families*. London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.
- Willott, S., & Griffin, C. (1997). Wham bam, am I a man? Unemployed men talk about masculinities. *Feminism and Psychology*, 7, 107-128.
- Working Families. (2010). *Returning to work: A guide for parents*. Retrieved May 26, 2010, from <http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/admin/uploads/Returntowork-parents.pdf>

# Talking about the personal – a pregnant researcher's experience of studying working parents in the UK

**Gemma Anne Yarwood**

The relationship between the researcher and researched is an important yet often under-scrutinised topic in family research. This article presents my account of negotiating this complex research relationship. I draw on qualitative interviews with 11 working parents in the United Kingdom. I also consider field notes of my feelings about my research relationships with the participants. In this article I discuss the challenges I faced in developing and managing these relationships. I describe how, as a white woman researcher in my mid-thirties, I became pregnant with my first child during the research process. This influenced the often taken-for-granted assumptions of developing and establishing relationships in research practice. My findings demonstrate the ways in which I was positioned by the participants within and outside mothering discourses based on cultural norms of femininity and heterosexuality. I conclude that it is important to acknowledge the importance of the embodied researcher and the potential impacts on the research process.

## Introduction

This article draws on qualitative data to consider the complex relationship between the researched and researcher. I outline the background to this study, including the conceptual framework. I consider constructions of motherhood and womanhood to contextualise my own personal biography. I move on to describe the complex relationship between the research participants and myself (a white, female researcher in her mid-thirties who became pregnant with her first child during the research process). I draw on interview data with 11 working parents in the United Kingdom (UK) and field notes of my feelings about the research relationships. My findings illuminate how participants positioned me in relation to mothering discourses based on cultural norms of femininity and heterosexuality. These norms construct womanhood and motherhood as mutually constitutive. I found I was problematised as a non-mother based on the associations with age and expectations of mothering within women's reasonable lifecourse (Sevón, 2005). In this article I discuss my own feelings and experiences about the complex relationships between myself and the participants. Specifically, I consider how participants positioned me in relation to normative discourses of mothering and expert researcher. I outline how, on becoming pregnant, the participants deemed it acceptable to comment on my physicality.

**Key words** motherhood • womanhood • discourse • research relationships

### *Constructions of the mother*

Letherby (2003) has argued that the idealised woman is constructed on notions of natural biological capacity to mother. This construction presents itself as the natural outcome of biology and an innate female maternal instinct (Roper and Capdevila, 2010). Motherhood and womanhood are conceptualised as mutually constitutive within a discourse of compulsory heterosexuality (Wager, 2000). Hicks (2006), in his work on lesbian parents, describes the construction of the heterosexual mother as naturalised in practices such as the adoption and fostering of children. Sevón (2005) has suggested that motherhood is a construction in which those inside heterosexual relationships are expected to have children. Women who are childless or child free are problematised (Wager, 2000). According to Shaw and Giles (2009), non-mothers and ageing mothers experience alienation with inferences of selfishness and violating the natural order.

Phoenix et al (1991) have argued that psychology is implicated in the social constructions of motherhood, fitting with political ideologies of the family. Implicit within political discourses of family values are references to a biological nuclear family in which mother is primary caregiver. According to Roper and Capdevila (2010), developmental psychology has been prominent in the construction of the contemporary ideal of a self-sacrificing mother, glossing over the social, cultural and historical context of this construction. Research by Gillies (2005) has evidenced the construction of the idealised white, middle-class, stay-at-home mother in UK policy. For Gillies (2005) and May (2004), the idealised mother construct is exclusionary and homogenised.

In their study of 'making modern mothers', Thomson et al (2011: 54) 'found ideas about gender and femininity to be habitually embodied in pregnancy'. They draw links between the pregnant body and constructions of the mother and women. Gatrell's (2008) consideration of pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers exposes how they are problematised as leaky bodies within public spaces of the workplace. She argues that the construction of the idealised mother is situated in private spheres of households, thus employed women who are pregnant or breast feeding are problematised (Gatrell, 2007).

The inextricable fusion of the subjective, embodied self and the sociopolitical self (Coffey, 1999) informs a burgeoning body of literature within feminist-informed qualitative work on women as researchers. Underpinning this literature is the argument that the private gendered and sexualised body of the woman cannot be clearly bounded from the public body of the researcher (Mauthner et al, 2002). In Coffey's (1999) work on the 'ethnographic self', she suggests that the body is a site of discourse and action, representational of one's biography. As a female researcher in my mid-thirties, I became pregnant during the parenting study on which this article is based. My research relationships were contextualised by the cultural expectations of mothering and womanhood (Thomson et al, 2011). According to Coffey (1999), qualitative researchers construct and write the lives of others while simultaneously negotiating and implicating themselves through interpersonal relationships with research participants. In this sense, the relationship between the participants and



myself, as the researcher, is key to the research process. Gabb (2011) calls for more imaginative approaches to capture the feelings and relational practices of intimacy and 'othering' by affording insights into the ways that we negotiate powerful differences in everyday living. In this article I consider the complex tensions created by different sets of normative values that the researcher and researched bring to research (Mauthner et al, 2002). I discuss how, through my changing personal biography, I experienced connections and disconnections with the research participants (Gabb, 2011).

### *Methodology*

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) define qualitative research as a situated activity that locates the observer in the world using an interpretive naturalistic approach. Drawing on this, I consider the following two questions, which are central to ongoing discussions among qualitative researchers. First, what can we learn about how fieldwork affects the researcher? Second, what can we learn about the research relationship by writing oneself into the research? According to Coffey (1999), researchers have given limited attention to both of these questions. Banister et al (2011) argue that these questions need to be addressed by qualitative researchers in an effort to develop epistemologies of the research process. In this article I draw on interview data and field notes to answer these questions about my own study.

Qualitative researchers interpret material practices that make the world visible (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews and memos to the self. With this in mind, I focus on my own field notes and the interview data to identify how I was affected in the research process and what I learnt about my relationship with the participants. Interestingly, these questions have received limited attention in qualitative research due to criticisms of navel gazing levelled at some qualitative researchers (Ramsey and Letherby, 2006). Pelias (2009) responds to those critics who fear that writing about oneself, as the researcher, can lead to what has been called 'the loss of the Other'. Pelias (2009) argues that writing about the self enables qualitative researchers to learn about their position in relation to others:

I pledge my allegiance to navel-gazing because all gazing, those kept private or those publicly shared, are social acts. To keep silent, to refuse to tell what one carries inside, is to acknowledge that all people are socially situated. Silence lives in awareness of consequences. I may not share because of shame or embarrassment, because of a sense of propriety, or because of an ethical responsibility to others, but each time I choose not to speak, I do so because I am thinking of the other. And when I tell the most intimate details of my life, I do so always aware all my personal feelings are located interpersonally. To be personal is to be with others. (Pelias, 2009: 355)

The personal feelings that Pelias (2009) refers to are the focus of this article as I consider my relationship with the parents I interviewed. I illuminate interview excerpts in which participants commented on my non-mother status (prior to my pregnancy)



and my pregnant body (during pregnancy). I consider how this made me feel and draw on the concept of 'reflexivity' (Doucet, 2007). This discussion is framed within feminist-informed research, which suggests that the researcher must be located in qualitative research. For Burns and Walker (2005: 67), this involves recognising the 'implication of the researcher in the production of knowledge and a breaking down of the "masculinist" separation of the private [world of the researcher] through the public [activity of research]'. I documented my feelings in my field notes while developing an awareness that, for many qualitative researchers, reflexivity has been mobilised to counter criticisms of navel gazing (Pelias, 2009). Here, I use the concept of 'reflexivity', broadly defined as reflecting on and understanding our own personal, political and intellectual biographies as researchers. This involves explicitly locating ourselves in relation to our research participants. It means acknowledging the critical roles we play in creating, interpreting and theorising research data (Doucet, 2007). Here I discuss how the participants positioned me within or outside constructions of motherhood and womanhood based on my personal biography. Gabb (2011) advocates research that recognises both sameness and difference when unpicking the complexity of relationality. To do this, I concur with Goodley and Smailes (2011) that, at a very fundamental level, I believe that no research is value free – and it is these values and research decisions I wish to render visible when discussing the complex relationship between myself, the researcher, and the research participants.

I adopted a discourse-driven iterative data analysis approach (Taylor, 2001), analysing my field notes and interview data to consider the influence of my personal biography on my relationship with the participants. According to Taylor (2001), this data analysis method is not a linear process. It relies on the researcher participating in the interviews while undertaking ongoing analysis of the data. In this sense, rather than undertaking all interviews and then analysing them, the procedure involved undertaking an interview, transcribing it, then commencing reading and initial analysis prior to undertaking the next interview. Throughout the research process I wrote field notes about my feelings regarding my relationship with the participants. Thus, this procedure was shaped iteratively by my changing biography throughout. Namely, at the beginning of the research I was working as a full-time academic researcher based in the UK. I was in my mid-thirties, in a heterosexual relationship with no children. Significantly, after the research was already under way (having undertaken interviews with five of my respondents) I became pregnant with my first child. In this article I discuss how this critical life event and identity change influenced me as a researcher and, consequently, my relationship with my research participants. In this article I present findings revealing how participants positioned me in relation to constructions of motherhood and womanhood based on my lack of children (prior to my pregnancy) and my pregnant body (during pregnancy). I argue that it is important to acknowledge the embodied researcher due to the impact on the research process. I discuss examples of this by drawing on interview data and field notes of my feelings about the research relationship, how it was affected by my changing status as a mother and my embodiment as a pregnant researcher.

## The study

The study involved semi-structured interviews with 11 working parents in the UK to learn about the discourses of parenting (including mothering and fathering) prevalent in their interview talk. The rationale was to analyse these findings within the context of parenting in the UK during the early 21st century. The research was undertaken during a period of social, economic and political transformation within the UK, namely economic recession, rising unemployment and changes to political leadership (Daly, 2010; ONS, 2011). Much mainstream literature charts macro changes of increased labour participation of mothers and increased participation of fathers in caring activities in the early 21st century (Fatherhood Institute, 2010; ONS, 2011). In an attempt to draw out discourses of parenting, the interview questions focused on changes in mothers' and fathers' participation in both the labour market and caring at home.

I interviewed five fathers and six mothers using semi-structured interviews. All the parents were living and working in the UK at the time of the data collection (2008–10). They varied in cohabiting arrangements, marital status and ethnicity. All fathers identified themselves as heterosexual, aged between 29 and 46 years old and in paid employment at the time of the data collection. Their occupations were as follows: police officer, sales consultant, information technology consultant, nurse and security guard. Thus, the occupations varied in type and contractual arrangements, including part-time work, full-time work, flexi-time, shift work, compressed hours, self-employment and temporary contracts. This variety of working arrangements and occupations was also true of the six mothers in the study. Their occupations were: nurse, librarian, business manager, social worker, civil servant and sales assistant.

When sampling participants I chose to include parents in paid work with children aged five years and under. I chose this because most contemporary changes to UK work–family policy (during the data collection period 2008–10) centred on families with children under five years old, namely extensions to parental leave entitlements and flexible working rights. Furthermore, I felt that the years from birth to five required the most significant levels of intensive caring (Craig and Sawrikar, 2009), thus providing the most data-rich site for this research.

Recruitment of the participants involved initial advertising using posters, websites and electronic communication tools such as emails and local library/community group notice boards in two towns within a 15-mile radius of a north-west city in England. The advertisements invited volunteers to make contact with me to discuss potential participation, ethical considerations and research procedures. I used a snowballing sampling technique, enabling me to ask those parents who volunteered in the first instance to act as gatekeepers, providing contact points to other potential participants. This enabled the sample group to expand through parents recommending others who fitted the sample criteria of being a working parent with a child under five years old. I was given access to informal networks developed through baby massage clubs, parent and toddler groups, and day nursery rhythm and rhyme sessions. These were all sites where I recruited the participants. In line with the policy landscape, I did not differentiate between parent and child residency arrangements, therefore co-residency

was not a requirement of the sample (two of the total 11 participants recruited did not live permanently with their child). I do not claim that those recruited in the study are representative (see Hansen et al, 2010, for evidence of this). Instead, the research aimed to gain a rich corpus of detailed accounts of their everyday parenting experiences.

Each interview lasted approximately an hour, with each parent interviewed separately using a semi-structured format. I gained signed ethical consent from each participant and the interviews took place in a negotiated location that both the participant and I felt comfortable with (Daly, 2007). I later transcribed the Dictaphone-recorded interview using a simplified version of Jeffersonian notation (O'Byrne et al, 2006).

## Data collection and analysis

The study aimed to produce qualitative evidence of discourses of parenting (including mothering and fathering), drawing on parents' interview talk. I used both semi-structured interview data and field notes. The field notes detailed my feelings about my relationships with the participants. In this article I argue that, as I did not come to my data as neutral and unmotivated, my own involvement informed the construction of the qualitative data throughout the research process (Pelias, 2009). To acknowledge and represent this, I present the case that in following an iterative discourse data analysis approach (Taylor, 2001), I was able to engage with the data reflexively, considering the entanglement of the data process with my personal biography, particularly changes to my own parental status.

Iterative discourse data analysis forms part of the feminist-informed research framework of the research. Taylor (2001: 38) defines this as

the researcher looking for patterns in the data but is not entirely sure what these will look like or what their significance will be. She or he must therefore approach the data with a certain blind faith, with a confidence that there is something there, no certainty about what.

I read and re-read the transcripts, focusing on talk about my parental status. I noticed that all participants asked about my parental status during the interviews. On identifying this data I then analysed how the participants mobilised two normative discourses of mother and expert researcher to position me. I recorded my feelings about the research relationships throughout this process. Mason (2002) contends that there are debates among qualitative researchers about what field notes represent and how they should be constituted. I chose to focus my field notes on the feelings about my research relationships. I cross-referenced the interviews with the field notes I made throughout the research process. For instance, I marked particular instances on the transcripts where participants asked me specific questions about my parental status, my response and what happened next (such as whether I answered 'yes' or 'no' and how the interview moved on from this instance).

Studying discourse involves 'the study of practices which systematically inform the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972: 49). A growing body of qualitative research focuses on the discursive construction of gender and sexuality in talk

(Wetherell et al, 2001). In studying discourses, researchers follow the assumption that people *do* things with their language; the way people speak in interviews does much more than simply convey a picture of what they are describing. Drawing on this framework I focused on how the interviews were sites of interaction in which participants drew on discourses of expert researcher and mother to position me in relation to these normative discourses.

The interviews were initiated with general demographic questions, which were followed by a variety of loosely structured questions based on key themes related to work–family reconciliation. For example: How do you negotiate your weekly schedule as a working parent? Although these were skeleton questions, I adopted an open and flexible approach, permitting the participants to raise and focus on the issues that were significant to them. This often involved them asking me questions. In particular, I was asked whether I too was a parent. To acknowledge my own presence, contribution and influence within the research process, I made my parental status known to the participants. Significantly, I had already conducted five interviews when I became pregnant. Throughout the iterative data analysis I documented field notes exploring how my changing parental status informed my feelings about the research relationship and how the participants positioned me as a researcher and women (before and after becoming a pregnant). I now turn to the findings to discuss the complex relationship between the research participants and myself.

## Findings

### *Shifting positions – the expert researcher discourse and the mother discourse*

The following excerpt is from an interview with Chloe, a 27-year-old black mother with two children. Chloe worked part time in a nursery. The excerpt highlights the expert researcher discourse and the mother discourse within Chloe's talk.<sup>1</sup>

#### *Excerpt 1*

- GY: "Could you tell me what work–family balance means to you?"
- Chloe: "Oh, I don't know much about work–family, you're the expert. I mean I know about my own life and working and doing family stuff. I'm hoping I'll learn something here from you. I'm looking to you to tell me about doing it the right way, that's your job, I can find out more. Are you a mum?"
- GY: "No."
- Chloe: "Oh I could tell you a thing or two for your research that you don't know what it's like because you're not one yourself, a mother that is."

The excerpt reveals how Chloe's talk initially positioned me as an expert researcher with knowledge about the "right way" to have a work–family balance. In positioning me in an expert discourse she verbalised what Letherby (2003) defines as researchers occupying positions of power based on specific knowledge and expertise about

the research. For example, Chloe referred to work–family balance stating: “Oh, I don’t know much about work–family, you’re the expert.” Here she positioned me as a researcher; she drew on cultural assumptions that being a researcher requires specialist knowledge and expertise. Ascribed to the expert researcher discourse is a complex power dynamic between the researcher and the researched (Letherby, 2003). Coufopoulos (2009), in her research on unhealthy homeless mothers, suggests that researchers have ultimate control over data collection and presentation, which often positions them as an outsider looking into the lives and experiences of the research participants. Despite feeling this control as a researcher, Coufopoulos (2009) describes how she felt she was an ‘outsider’ trying to fit in with her participants. One strategy she used to ‘fit in’ with her participants was to reveal her own personal experiences of homelessness (Coufopoulos, 2009). Similarly to Coufopoulos (2009), I felt I was positioned as an outsider as both a researcher and a non-mother in that I did not share lived experiences of mothering, thus did not ‘fit in’. This is evident in Chloe’s talk as she shifted from a discourse of expert researcher to a mother discourse by asking me: “Are you a mum?” On disclosing my non-mother status, Chloe commented: “You don’t know what it’s like because you’re not one yourself, a mother that is.” My field notes documented how she was somewhat disappointed that, although I was a researcher, I was not a mother. Chloe drew on cultural assumptions about different types of knowledge associated with these discourses of expert researcher and mother. Chloe differentiated between researcher knowledge and mother knowledge. In doing so she afforded different values to the knowledge I may have brought to the interview. Letherby (2003), in her analysis of researcher relationships, revealed that a non-mother identity could result in women being positioned as ‘other’ regardless of their research expertise, knowledge or personal biography. In this instance, as a women researcher and non-mother, I felt that Chloe positioned me as ‘other’, drawing on cultural expectations of women becoming mothers (Thomson et al, 2011). According to Gabb (2011), people make sense of difference and significant otherness within embedded interpersonal practices. As I was not a mother at this point in the research, I did not meet the cultural expectations associated with women and motherhood.

By analysing this and other excerpts I found that the participants positioned me outside mothering discourses based on the assumption that I did not share their knowledge and experience of mothering and parenting. In other words: ‘I was not a mother, therefore I was not one of them.’ Their talk made explicit reference to my lack of lived experience of mothering and parenting. Chloe and other participants gave examples to support and authenticate their experiences of mothering and parenting. Interestingly, the participants talked about their own lack of experience prior to them becoming parents. Miller (2005), in her longitudinal study of first-time mothering, found that women often talked about how experiences of mothering led to a reordering of priorities in their lives. In my field notes I documented how I felt the participants were signposting my exclusion from the mother discourse using examples of lived experiences of parenting/mothering. For instance, Chloe suggested that I could not understand the realities of parenting because, despite being “the expert” researcher, I was not a mother myself.

*Being problematised as a non-mother*

My analysis revealed how I was problematised as a non-mother, positioned outside the natural mother discourse. The excerpt below demonstrates this, which is from an interview with Rick, a 30-year-old, white, full-time sales consultant. He has one son.

*Excerpt 2*

- Rick: "How many kids have you got?"  
 GY: "None."  
 Rick: "Why haven't you had kids yet? What's wrong?"  
 GY: "Nothing is wrong. I'm just not a mother."  
 Rick: "Has work got in the way? Or, you know, is it something else?"  
 GY: "No."  
 Rick: "Have you not found the right man yet?"  
 GY: "I do have a partner, a boyfriend."

This excerpt reveals my experience of being positioned as problematic within a mother discourse. Wager (2000: 390) notes that hegemonic discourses of femininity construct women in a way that they 'are supposed to have maternal instincts which destines them to have children and [to] subordinate their own interests to those of their offspring'. In this sense, as Wager (2000) argues, the discourse of 'mother' is one of naturally self-sacrificing one's personal identity to care and nurture others. Therefore when I disclosed my non-mother status in the interview, Rick positioned me outside these hegemonic discourses of mothering represented in parenting literature, healthcare, the popular media and policy (Thomson et al, 2011). To concur with Letherby (2003), my experience as a non-mother researcher was that these mothering discourses assume a link between motherhood and women. They normalise women's identities as mothers, problematising women who are childless or childfree.

Linked to this, I found that the interview data also revealed incidences in which my disclosure of not being a parent resulted in both explicit and implicit questions regarding my heterosexuality. As Wager (2000) states, motherhood and gender are conceptualised as mutually constitutive, within a discourse of compulsory heterosexuality. Motherhood is constructed as a mandatory integral part of a 'normal' female identity. Women who are married or in stable heterosexual relationships need less to consider whether or not to have children but rather when to have children, how many to have or in what social context to have them (Sevón, 2005).

Thus, I experienced first-hand how notions of motherhood are normalised in talk as the parents asked questions as to why I was not a mother. The excerpt above reveals how Rick tried to make sense of why I was not a mother by asking, "Have you not found the right man yet?" By replying: "I do have a partner, a boyfriend" I felt that I was affirming my heterosexuality choosing to add the word 'boyfriend' after initially defensively disclosing that "I do have a partner." My field notes documented how I felt I gave a more detailed defence of my heterosexuality than Rick's first suggestion that "Has work got in the way? Or, you know, is it something else?" I felt that this

excerpt demonstrated how I managed the information I disclosed about my personal biography. As a researcher I felt aware that participants asked questions to piece together a fuller picture of me. However, as Letherby (2003) suggests, as a researcher I could choose the biographical information I shared with the participants. I was happy to present myself, an adult woman who, when questioned about personal relationships, identified herself as heterosexual. However, I did not want to answer questions about my capacity to have children. In part, this was because I did not know if I *had* the capacity to have children. Emotionally I had configured this as out of bounds of the interview discussions because I feared I was not ready to discuss this aspect of my personal biography with the participants.

Another way in which I was problematised was based on my age. The following excerpt is from an interview with Sarah, a 36-year-old white mother with one son. Sarah worked part time in a retail outlet. The excerpt highlights Sarah describing her mothering practices. She explicated the link between my womanhood and assumed mother status and appeared shocked when I said I was not a mother. Sarah's focus was on motherhood being embedded within women's expected lifecourse.

### *Excerpt 3*

- GY: "Could you tell me how you manage working and being a parent?"  
 Sarah: "Oh it is hard fitting work and kids stuff together. Do you have kids?"  
 GY: "No."  
 Sarah: "Oh I assumed you did, I bet me and you are about the same age. Well I got there in the end and until you're a mum yourself, you don't know the half of it."

In this excerpt, Sarah verbalised her assumption that I was a mother on the basis of my age: "Oh I assumed you did [have children], I bet me and you are about the same age. Well I got there in the end..." Sarah drew on notions of womanhood and motherhood being mutually constitutive. Embedded in Sarah's talk was the assumption that the timing of motherhood is associated with social and cultural narratives of the reasonable female lifecourse (Sevón, 2005). I felt that Sarah was trying to reassure me – "Well I got there in the end" – suggesting that I could be a mother like her. Sarah's talk described how there was hope for women to become mothers even when they were 'our age' (Sarah was 36). In doing so, her talk revealed the shifting positioning of me as outside mothering norms while acknowledging that, despite my mid-thirties age, I could become a mother like her. The assumption that women would have children as part of their life development made me feel judged by Sarah on the basis of my age. My field notes documented how I felt that I did not fit in yet, unlike Coufopoulos (2009), I did not talk about wanting to become a mother or defend my non-mother status by giving reasons to justify this. Despite feeling that Sarah positioned me as an outsider to the norms of mothering based on my age, I did not challenge this assumption in the interview. I knew that there was evidence of a gradual rise in the age at which women give birth to their first child (Shaw and Giles, 2009) yet I was equally aware that non-mothers and ageing mothers are often



marginalised with implied claims of selfishness and violation of the natural order. I documented in my field notes that I worried that I may offend Sarah if I challenged these normative assumptions. In particular, I feared that she may withdraw from the study. This was based on what I described as an already tenuous relationship because when I arrived at the interview Sarah she stated: "I'm not sure I want to volunteer anymore." However, I acknowledged in my field notes that this was an example of the complex decision-making process that researchers must make during interviews (Mauthner et al, 2002).

### *My embodied experiences of pregnancy*

During my pregnancy, my physical appearance provided a significant embodied representation of me becoming a mother. As the following excerpt from Leila reveals, participants demonstrated an interest to learn more about my pregnancy and talked about my pregnant body. Leila was a 32-year-old white woman with two daughters. She worked part time as a qualified social worker.

#### *Excerpt 4*

- GY: "Hello, thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. As agreed it will be recorded using this Dictaphone and should last approximately one hour."
- Leila: "You are not going to go into labour here are you?"
- GY: "No."
- Leila: "When is your baby due?"
- GY: "September."
- Leila: "You are quite big."

This excerpt comes from a period in the research when it was visibly evident that I was pregnant. By virtue of its visible embodiment, my pregnancy was integral to how my identity was co-constructed in the interviews during this period (Burr, 2003). Following Merleau-Ponty's (1962, cited in Langer, 1989: 45) argument that '[w]e are in the world through our body, and ... we perceive that world within our body', I found that my pregnant appearance in the interviews provided a visible cue that prompted parents to ask questions about the pregnancy. I felt encouraged by the participants asking questions, believing this to be a sign of their engagement and interest in the interview. However, the construction of my identity as a pregnant researcher was also a challenging experience because of the questions asked. In particular, sometimes I did not want to talk about my pregnancy.

In some of the interviews I felt that my physical appearance was being scrutinised, for instance as a result of Leila's comment: "You are quite big," which made me feel self-conscious. Having not been used to people making explicit comments about my physical appearance before being pregnant, these questions and comments often made me feel uncomfortable during the interviews. Twigg (2006) suggests that many researchers feel uneasy with the messy empirical realities of the fleshy material



body. For Gatrell (2005), the physical embodiment of pregnancy can signify societal assumptions that there are differential notions of acceptability when discussing physicality that in other circumstances would not be considered normative practices of talk. In this sense, I felt that the visibility of my pregnancy meant that the information about my embodied experiences was public. I believe, if I had a choice, I would sometimes choose not to make this visible or open to such public scrutiny. I feel that this reflects mainstream literature suggesting that employed pregnant women often feel they are problematised due to their perceived leaky bodies, which often positions them outside the normalised worker discourse (Gatrell, 2007).

Unlike the interviews prior to my pregnancy, in the interviews during my pregnancy there was no reference to me as a researcher. Thus, it is my belief that becoming pregnant and the embodied visibility of this provided participants with a reference point during their discussions about their own parenting identities. My data analysis revealed that, on seeing the visibility of my pregnancy, the participants shared their own parenting experiences. I believe that my pregnant body was tangible in its physical state and thus presented an embodied reference point to my identity.

## Discussion

Throughout this article I have explained how my changing parental status influenced my relationship with the research participants. By analysing participants' talk, I found that they mobilised discourses of expert researcher and mother. In particular, participants drew on assumptions about mothering and parenting practices and norms. Traditionally, positions of power have been associated with the researcher in a didactic relationship with the research participant. Willig (2008) observed that power relations between researcher and participants are often subtle in qualitative research, thus researchers should be careful not to ignore or deny them. In this article, I have drawn on my own experiences and feelings as a researcher to suggest that power relations were fluid and shifting during the interviews based on how I was positioned by the participants with reference to the discourses of expert researcher and mother.

According to Rich (1977), women are represented as either mothers or potential mothers. In my experience, before I was pregnant with my first child, the participants positioned me in relation to my potential to become a mother. In the early stages of the research I disclosed to the participants that I was not a mother. I felt that they problematised me as a woman in her mid-thirties in a heterosexual relationship with no children. Motherhood and gender are conceptualised as mutually constitutive within a discourse of compulsory heterosexuality (Wager, 2000). In this sense I posed a dilemma to the participants who constructed motherhood as a mandatory, integral part of a 'normal' female identity. In some cases, the participants offered me support and information about their lived experiences of parenting and mothering. For instance, they talked of their experiences of reordering their priorities in life once they had become a parent.

On becoming pregnant, its embodiment provided a visible reference point during the interviews. This is not the case for other identity changes or personal biographical details that are not embodied. Letherby (2003: 130) has described how her own

research on childlessness was impacted by her choices to reveal her own positioning and biography.

[I]n first interviews I always talked or wrote little about my own experience. Once told, a few respondents appeared to accept this as justification for my interest and my experience was rarely referred to again. Occasionally I felt silenced ... many respondents wrote or told me that they felt comfortable relating to me *because* I understood what they were going through.

For some researchers, disclosure of personal biography is a choice; however; for embodied experiences such as pregnancy, this is not a straightforward choice. In fact I felt that I needed to navigate the interviews carefully. I did this by balancing my openness and acknowledgement of my pregnant body with a self-awareness that I needed to keep check of my feelings of self-consciousness about participants talking explicitly about my body. Unlike other forms of physicality, the embodiment of pregnancy can signify differential notions of acceptability in talk (Gatrell, 2005).

In this article I have discussed my research field notes to identify my feelings about negotiating and re-negotiating my own identity within the context of normalised heterosexuality and femininity. In presenting interview excerpts I have revealed the judgements I made not to challenge participants when I felt I was being problematised and schooled in cultural norms of womanhood and mothering. I found that I did not challenge these in the interviews explicitly for fear of disrupting the research relationship. I judged the possibility of participants leaving the research study to be too great a loss. Instead, I managed my personal biography disclosures during the interviews and documented my feelings about the research relationship in my field notes. In part, my adoption of a feminist-informed research framework guided my decision-making processes. I acknowledge that research is rarely a smooth or linear process (Letherby, 2003) and this in part is due to the richness of the relationship between researcher and participant (Mauthner et al, 2002). In fact, I concur with Mauthner and Doucet (1998: 125) that reflexivity and our personal and professional development are part of an ongoing data analysis process, 'which takes place throughout, and often extends beyond, the life of the research project'. Thus, I immersed myself in the research process, developing a greater understanding and knowledge of my research relationships with the participants.

To conclude, as a researcher, my changing parental status was a significant personal life experience that shaped my understanding, knowledge and interactions with others, including the research participants. My journey through pregnancy provided me with a unique personal reference point as a researcher interviewing parents. In my researcher role, I developed an awareness of the need to signpost my transition to motherhood in the research process by embedding reflexivity within the research process. My experience of being a pregnant researcher influenced the epistemological and methodological dilemmas I was working through, namely the complex and often shifting influences of personal biography on research relationships. Obviously, becoming pregnant involved an embodied experience that I could not or would not have wished to escape, at least to some extent. Similarly, my personal biography has

influenced my own worldview. As I write now, I cannot stop being an educated, white, 30-something, British working mother; neither do I pretend not to be. However, as a researcher, I have attempted to address the issue of how my own changing personal biography, together with the experiences of my participants as parents, influenced the research relationship.

### Note

<sup>1</sup> All names have been changed to protect anonymity.

### References

- Banister, P., Bunn, G., Burman, E., Daniels, J., Duckett, P., Goodley, D., Lawthorn, R., Parker, I., Runswick-Cole, K., Sixsmith, J., Smailes, S., Tindall, C. and Wheelan, P. (eds) (2011) *Qualitative methods in psychology: A research guide*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Burns, D. and Walker, M. (2005) 'Feminist methodologies', in B. Somekh and C. Lewin (eds) *Research methods in the social sciences*, London: Sage Publications.
- Burr, V. (2003) *Social constructionism*, Hove: Routledge.
- Coffey, A. (1999) *The ethnographic self, fieldwork and the representation of identity*, London: Sage Publications.
- Coufopoulos, A. (2009) 'Behind closed doors: a healthy female researcher's reflective account of investigating the experiences of unhealthy homeless mothers', *ENQUIRE*, 4: 73–89.
- Craig, L. and Sawrikar, P. (2009) 'Work and family: how does the (gender) balance change as children grow?', *Gender, Work & Organization*, 16 (6): 684–709.
- Daly, K. (2007) *Qualitative methods for family studies and human development*, London: Sage Publications.
- Daly, M. (2010) 'Shifts in family policy in the UK under New Labour', *Journal of European Social Policy*, 20 (5): 433–43.
- Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds) (2008) *Collecting interpreting qualitative materials* (3rd edition), London: Sage Publications.
- Doucet, A. (2007) *Do men mother?*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Fatherhood Institute (2010) *The fatherhood report 2010–11: The Fairness in Families Index*, Abergavenny: Fatherhood Institute.
- Foucault, M. (1972) *Archaeology of knowledge*, New York, NY: Pantheon.
- Gabb, J. (2011) 'Family lives and relational living: taking account of otherness', *Sociological Research Online*, 16 (4), [www.socresonline.org.uk/16/4/10.html](http://www.socresonline.org.uk/16/4/10.html)
- Gatrell, C. (2005) *Hard labour: The sociology of parenthood*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Gatrell, C. (2007) 'Secrets and lies: breastfeeding and professional paid work', *Social Science & Medicine*, 65 (2): 393–404.
- Gatrell, C. (2008) *Embodying women's work*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Gillies, V. (2005) 'Meeting parents' needs? Discourses of "support" and "inclusion" in family policy', *Critical Social Policy*, 25 (1): 70–90.

- Goodley, D. and Smailes, S. (2011) 'Positionalities', in P. Banister, G. Bunn, E. Burman, J. Daniels, P. Duckett, D. Goodley, R. Lawthom, I. Parker, K. Runswick-Cole, J. Sixsmith, S. Smailes, C. Tindall and P. Wheelan (eds) (2011) *Qualitative methods in psychology: A research guide*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Hansen, K., Joshi, H. and Dex, S. (eds) (2010) *Children of the 21st century: The first five years*, The Millennium Cohort Study series, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hicks, S. (2006) 'Maternal men-perverts and deviants? Making sense of gay men as foster carers and adopters', *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 2 (1): 993–114.
- Langer, M. (1989) *Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception: A guide and commentary*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Letherby, G. (2003) *Feminist research in theory and practice*, Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Mason, J. (2002) *Qualitative researching*, London: Sage Publications.
- Mauthner, M., Birch, M., Jessop, J. and Miller, T. (2002) *Ethics in qualitative research*, London: Sage Publications.
- Mauthner, N.S. and Doucet, A. (1998) 'Reflections on a voice-centred relational method of data analysis: analysing maternal and domestic voices', in J. Ribbens and R. Edwards (eds) *Feminist dilemmas in qualitative research: Private lives and public texts*, London: Sage Publications, 119–44.
- May, V. (2004) 'Narrative identity and the re-conceptualization of lone motherhood', *Narrative Inquiry*, 14: 169–89.
- Miller, T. (2005) *Making sense of motherhood: A narrative approach*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Byrne, R., Rapley, M. and Hansen, S. (2006) "'You couldn't say 'no', could you?': young men's understandings of sexual refusal", *Feminism & Psychology*, 16 (2): 133–54.
- ONS (Office for National Statistics) (2011) 'Families and households in the UK 2001 to 2010', *Statistical Bulletin*, 11 April 2011, Newport: ONS.
- Pelias, R.J. (2009) 'Pledging personal allegiance to qualitative inquiry', *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 2 (3): 351–6.
- Phoenix, A., Woollett, A. and Lloyd, E. (eds) (1991) *Motherhood: Meanings, practices and ideologies*, London: Sage Publications.
- Ramsey, K. and Letherby, G. (2006) 'The experiences of academic non-mothers in the gendered university', *Gender, Work & Organization*, 13 (1): 25–44.
- Rich, A. (1977) *Of woman born: Motherhood as experience and institution*, London: Viagro.
- Roper, S. and Capdevila, R. (2010) "'We are a real family': a Q methodological study on the experiences of stepmothers", *Radical Psychology*, 9 (2), [www.radicalpsychology.org/vol9-2/roper.html](http://www.radicalpsychology.org/vol9-2/roper.html)
- Sevón, E. (2005) 'Timinig motherhood: experiencing and narrating the choice to become a mother', *Feminism and Psychology*, 15 (4): 461–82.
- Shaw, R.L. and Giles, D.C. (2009) 'Motherhood on ice? A media framing analysis of older mothers in the UK news', *Psychology and Health*, 24 (2): 221–36.
- Taylor, S. (2001) 'Locating and conducting discourse analytic research', in M. Wetherell, S. Taylor and S. Yates (eds) *Discourse as data*, London: Sage Publications.
- Thomson, R., Kehily, M.J., Hadfield, L. and Sharpe, S. (2011) *Making modern mothers*, Bristol: The Policy Press.

- Twigg, J. (2006) *The body in health and social care*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wager, M. (2000) 'Childless by choice? Ambivalence and the female identity', *Feminism & Psychology*, 10 (3): 389–95.
- Wetherell, M., Taylor, S. and Yates, S. (2001) *Discourse as data*, London: Sage Publications.
- Wetherell, M., Taylor, S. and Yates, S. (2001b) *Discourse theory and practice*, London: Sage Publications.
- Willig, C. (2008) 'Discourse analysis', in J.A. Smith (ed) *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods*, London: Sage Publications, 160–85.

---

**Gemma Anne Yarwood**

Department of Social Work and Social Care,  
Faculty of Health, Psychology and Social Care,  
Manchester Metropolitan University, UK  
g.yarwood@mmu.ac.uk